





SEAWAYS

By the Same Author

UNREALITY

AN AWFULLY BIG ADVENTURE

THE LONG TRICK

NAVAL OCCASIONS

A TALL SHIP

SEAWAYS

By
"BARTIMEUS"



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To
VICE-ADMIRAL
SIR ALLAN F. EVERETT,
K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., C.B.

*"Cumberland," Admiralty,
"Calliope," "Calcutta,"
1909-1921,*

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SEAWAYS

I

A SON OF CONSOLATION

IMAGINE a benign-visaged prelate of the Church with the eyes of a High Court Judge and the slow-moving dignity of a dowager. Clothe your conception in the neat, rather threadbare serge "rig" of a Petty Officer, Royal Navy. Seat him in the corner of a third-class railway carriage two minutes before starting time, his mysterious, black-silk covered bundle (why should these bundles always invoke curiosity to an extent no other traveller's luggage does?) on the rack over his head; an empty pipe in his mouth; his hands, large, hard-nailed, with the tattoo-stains showing through the hairy tan, slowly shredding coarse tobacco between his palms.

In brief, a Man of the Sea, whose eyes took in the occupants of the carriage without curiosity, apparently assigned them one by one to an easily recognized soul-category, and turned to the window. Then, with a kind of benevolent gesture of his right hand, holding the empty pipe, he half rose and insinuated his broad shoulders through the open window.

"Sykey!" he said. I use the verb deliberately.

Without giving the carriage any impression that he had raised his voice above a conversational tone, he had managed to convey the sound twenty yards down a crowded platform, to insinuate it through the cries of paper and chocolate vendors and the clash of rolling milk cans, even to the ears of a Sergeant of the Royal Marine Artillery.

The Petty Officer's *vis-à-vis*, a citizen of ample girth, with mutton-chop whiskers and a purple dew-lap, started at the classic name. He adjusted his glasses and peered forth, apparently in search of some fair form unveiled before his gaze. The Sergeant turned. A slow smile sent the waxed points of his moustache towards the lobe of each ear, but somehow failed to reach the remainder of a countenance saturnine and lean, burnt nearly black by tropic suns. His nailed boots clanked on the stone platform as he strode towards the carriage door. The Petty Officer replaced his pipe in his mouth and extended a formidable hand. "Well, Sergeant Sykes, how is it?"

The Sergeant, who carried a sausage-shaped kit-bag and a rifle, in addition to his heavy marching order, made a curious backward and then sideways motion of the head that somehow conveyed more than a glib conversationalist could compass in five minutes' hard talking. Translated into French it would have been a shrug.

"Come in here," said the Petty Officer. "Plenty of room. These gentlemen——" The stem of the empty pipe included the occupants of the crowded carriage in a gesture that left them no choice in the matter. They made room hastily, each a

British citizen whose seat in a railway carriage is his inalienable kingdom.

"Best pass that bag aft to the guard's van, Sykey," said the arbiter of the carriage's seating accommodation.

"Not me," said Sergeant Sykes. He sat down between the disillusioned classical scholar and a gentleman who had omitted to shave (but wore a purple tie thrust through a signet ring), and placed the kitbag jealously between his bony knees.

"Souvenirs," he said darkly. "That bag ain't left my sight 'tween Muscat and here." He prodded it with a lean forefinger. "There's a Turk's pelvis in that bag—not to mention a Harab hand-grenade what misfired. *Had it not misfired*"—he was zealous in the matter of aspirates—"Sergeant Sykes wouldn't be setting here."

"Ah!" said the Petty Officer. He was lighting his pipe, stabbing an apparently asbestos-tipped forefinger into the glowing bowl between each suck and puff. "That's where you was, was it?"

"Certainly. Meso-potamy an' the Persian Gulf." He removed his helmet and wiped his head. "Three years and seven months." A mirthless laugh punctuated the sentence. "Landed at Plymouth at 2.30 P.M."

The Petty Officer looked shocked. "Shut!" he said.

"Shut!" echoed Sergeant Sykes in the tone of one turned away from the Golden Gate. "Every blessed one. Even the Crossed Killick—they used to know me there. Closin' hours! Bah!" He brooded darkly. "War profiteers, I call 'em. They

make a man work up a thirst no human ought to have by rights. An' then, why, of course, he'd drink any swipes. I asked for Bella——"

"She's gone," said the other quickly. "Married a Master-at-Arms. Done very well for herself."

"*Did* she now?" said the home-comer. He stared absently at the passing landscape and twirled his moustache. "Did she. . . . They didn't say——"

"It's poor beer there nowadays," said the Petty Officer, sympathetically changing the subject.

The Marine shook his head. "When you been three years and seven months in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf, there ain't no poor beer. Some beers is better than others, that's all."

The Petty Officer puffed reflectively at his pipe. "Maybe," he said slowly, and his eyes took on more than ever the grave, just calm that one associates with woollen and ermine. One felt that somewhere behind those tranquil eyes the depths of the well of Truth were stirring.

"I'll spin you a yarn," he said. "Maybe you'll see the humour of it. There's them as don't. They ain't been three years in the Persian Gulf——"

"Three years and seven months," amended the Marine, caressing the kitbag. "Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf."

"This 'ere's a Gran' Fleet yarn," said the sailor. He wore the South African and "Boxer" medal ribbons, in addition to the Long Service and Good Conduct, the 1914-15 Star, the "Victory" ribbon, and, on the other side, the Royal Humane Society's strip of blue. One wondered how many "Yarns" he carried behind that benignant forehead.

"Go ahead," said the Marine, loosening his belt. The carriage settled itself comfortably behind its newspapers.

"We was down at the southern base—you know; we took it in turns by squadrons to put in a month at a time there for purposes of giving leaf, recreation, an' such like——"

"I heard you was pampered darlin's," said the sojourner in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf.

The Petty Officer nodded. "That's just 'ow they behaved, some of 'em. First it was one thing, then another. I was Canteen Representative of our ship. I tell you I led a dog's life. The ham-sandwiches was too thick, they didn't have enough spittoons—couldn't walk a yard to spit, some of 'em. Billiard tables wasn't true——"

"Billiard tables!" sighed Sergeant Sykes, showing the gamboge whites of his eyes.

"War weariness, o' course," said the Petty Officer, suddenly changing his front. Perhaps he thought the Blue Marine was growing a trifle too contemptuous of the northern mists and the rigours they shielded.

"I've struck it," said the other. "*Had* some, you might say."

The Petty Officer disregarded the interruption. "Lastly it was the beer. The quality of the beer."

The Sergeant looked at the narrator with an expression St. Stephen might have worn with grace. Words had apparently failed him.

"I'm not saying, mind you, that the beer seemed all it might ha' been. First week it was fine, then

it seemed to grow weak, and when our time came to go back to Scapa it was downright nasty. Worse'n that, a lot of our chaps was took ill. The Doctor said they'd been eatin' whelks, an' whelks was *taboo* after that; but they said it was the canteen beer. Someone started the buzz that German agents was poisoning the beer—sabotage, they calls it—an' when the influenzy started to run through the Squadron, course it was germs in the beer. Time came when none of the chaps would drink the stuff. Leastways, they drank it, but makin' faces, same as if they was takin' physic. Course that couldn't go on——”

“Poor fellers,” murmured the Marine, acidly.

“—an' the matter was brought to the notice of the authorities.”

“Jellicoe, Beatty, Lord Percy Scott, and that little lot!”

“Flag Officer Commanding the Squadron took the matter up. Made a signal one forenoon: ‘Ships are to land one Canteen Representative of Petty Officer or Non-Commissioned Rank at 10 A.M. for duty at Canteen.’ I went from our ship. Four bells in the forenoon watch and me Captain of X.1 turret.

“Course, I didn't know what was ahead. I reckoned it was going to be a palaver, and I wasn't best pleased at leavin' my turret through cleanin' quarters, an' that just to go an' *talk* about beer. There was a Hydraulic Tiffy* in my turret, fond o' muckin' about——”

The narrator broke off, apparently realizing that he had wandered from the point. He passed his

* Engine-room artificer.

fingers thoughtfully round his clean-shaven jaws and resumed :

"There was ten of us all told. Eight battleship representatives. The Destroyers sent a Torpedo Coxswain an' the Submarines a Chief Stoker. We walked up together from the pier, wonderin' among ourselves what they wanted with us ashore in the middle of the forenoon watch, an', as I say, most of us wasn't too well pleased. One or two was uneasy about their seven-bell tots, not trustin' their messmates too far. What with one thing an' another, it was a glum-faced party trapsed up the hill—'member that hill to the Canteen past the goal posts an' under them trees. . . ."

The Sergeant nodded. One fellow-traveller at least had a vision of that sedate blue-clad gathering, grizzled heads wagging over enforced truantry from turret and store-room, wending its way up the gritty road towards the Canteen with the demure solemnity of a Mothers' Meeting. . . .

"Commander Dawning met us—he was Canteen President. A very nice gentleman. 'Step into the dispensary,' said he, solemn like. That was his way of jokin'."

The Petty Officer paused in his narrative, sucked interrogatively at his pipe, and finding it had gone out relit it. The Marine stared with melancholy eyes at the fair English countryside streaming past the window.

"So we steps inside the Petty Officers' smokin'-room an' there, rigged up in a row with a spigot an' tap in each, was seventeen little hogsheads like what they packs oysters in. Each was numbered

in white paint from one to seventeen. Wonderful organizer he was, Commander Dawning."

The Marine turned his weary, fever-yellowed eyes towards the speaker. The tip of his tongue was visible for an instant as it passed over his lips.

"'Now,' he says, 'we won't waste time talkin'. You all knows about this here Canteen beer and the complaints of the Squadron. I've called for samples,' he says, 'from every brewery in Scotland, and here they are. Go ahead and decide which is the best.' With that he hands us out—what d'you suppose he gives us apiece to sample beer with from them hogsheads? . . ."

"'Ose pipes," said the marine huskily.

The sailor levelled a wet pipe stem between his eyes.

"D'you remember what the officers drinks champagne wine out of—you was wardroom servant once? Them little tumblers? . . . Holds p'r'aps half a gill—them we had."

"Go on," said the agonized voice of the R.M.A.

"That's what he said—Commander Dawning. 'Go on,' he said, 'sample away. One glass outer each cask.' With that he hands us each a black lead an' a bit of paper. 'Make notes,' he said, solemn as a judge, mind you, but I was port stroke of his cutter when he was a snottie an' I could see him laughin' at the backs of his eyes, same as he used to."

"I don't see no call for skylarkin'," interposed the Sergeant, "in a matter of Beer."

"Well, we wasn't skylarkin' neither. We just walked along the row drinkin' them little thimble-

fuls of beer and comparin' notes, E-eliminatin' them, if you follows me, one by one."

"What was they like?" queried the Sergeant wistfully.

"Well, the first was a fair beer but not bitter enough—coppery like. The second——"

The train was perceptibly slackening speed. A signal-box went slowly past, and we entered a station. The Marine undid one button of his tunic, fumbled within and drew out a massive silver watch.

"Excuse me interruptin', old ship," he said, "but what time might these profiteers condescend to open their perishin' boo-fays?"

"Six o'clock," said the sailor.

The Marine buckled his belt. "Then seeing as how it's three minutes past, d'you surmise we might step out and stretch our legs? . . ."

He didn't wait for the answer nor yet for the train to come to a standstill. He opened the door and glided out of the carriage. The Petty Officer, dignified, but wasting no time, followed. The crowd that surged about the entrance to the refreshment-room swallowed them.

"I hope," said the stout citizen, "they won't be tempted to miss the train. I'd like to hear the rest of that story."

The minutes passed and the carriage grew restive.

"Take your seats!" said the voice of the guard somewhere along the platform. Doors banged. The fat man leaned out of the window. "Guard," he said, "there are two gentlemen still in the refreshment room." The guard's retort was a shrill blast on his whistle.

"There!" said the wearer of the purple tie. "Now they've missed it."

A solemn-faced individual with a bowler hat ornamented by a broad mourning band sniffed as the train started. "If I had my way," he said, "the sale of intoxicating liquors in railway stations would be prohibited to members of His Majesty's Forces at all hours. They are a snare and a pitfall——"

Shouts and clattering of nailed boots along the platform interrupted him. The door was jerked open to admit the Petty Officer, who had swung himself with surprising agility on to the footboard, turned and caught his breathless companion by the arm, and sat down in his regained seat with unruffled composure.

The Marine wiped his moustache with his handkerchief. "Go on," he said, "what about the seventeenth?"

The carriage heaved a sigh of relief. It had evidently missed nothing seriously relevant to the main issue of the story. Posset by posset that Homeric sampling had been resampled in the teller's tale and his hearer's imagination, that was all.

"The seventeenth," said the Petty Officer, with his hands on his knees and his grey judicial eyes on the scenery, "the seventeenth was like the ninth—too gassy. Apt to blow you out. That completed the tour, so to speak.

"'Now,' says Dawning, 'now you've all given 'em a fair trial, what's the verdict?' Well, there was three brands we couldn't agree upon, numbers twelve, seven and five. They was the best, but which was the best of that three we couldn't decide. So

at last I says—knowin' him as a snottie I could talk man to man like—' Well, sir,' I says, ' if so be as we could have a pint mug and have a proper drink, I reckon we'd be in a better position to make up our minds.' So he sings out to the server to bring mugs, an' we had a pint a-piece out of each of them three.

" ' Well,' he says, ' how's that ? ' "

" ' Number seven,' I says prompt.

" ' Hands up for number seven ? ' "

" They all puts up their hands 'cept the Submarine representative. He wanted twelve.

" ' Then seven is the beer you select ? ' says Dawning, and I see that twinkle in his eye again.

" ' Yes, sir,' I says. ' That's what in our opinion is the best beer of all them seventeen casks, and good beer at that.'

" ' Well,' says he, ' I'm glad to hear you say so. There was only one firm that didn't send a sample, and that was the firm supplying the beer at present on tap in the Canteen. They said they had no other quality,' he says, ' so I filled up an empty hogshead and numbered it along with the rest. The beer you've chosen is the beer you've been drinking and complaining about for weeks. The meeting is adjourned.' "

The narrator paused, and the gravity of his countenance remained unrelaxed; his eyes still sought the landscape, and save for the hum of the wheels there was silence in the carriage.

" That's a good yarn," said the Marine, unsmiling as the narrator. He twirled the points of his moustache and appeared to sink into a reverie. Presently he leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"You did surprise me when you mentioned about Bella marryin'. Me and her used to walk out. There wasn't many men could handle Bella. I was one."

"But you're still a bachelor, ain't you?" inquired the sailor, and the Sergeant nodded lugubriously.

"An' if you'd married Bella you wouldn't be a bachelor no more."

"That's right," affirmed the other.

The Petty Officer began to knock out the ashes of his pipe against the heel of his boot.

"If you was to see Bella's husband," he said thoughtfully, "you'd be glad you was a bachelor. You'd feel like we did walking down from the Canteen that forenoon, kind of ashamed of an illusion. An' whenever you starts to hanker after matrimony—you what's a happy bachelor—just remember my yarn about the beer."

"I thought there was a moral in that there story," said the Sergeant of Marines.

II

IN THE DOG-WATCHES

“SHIP’S Company—’Shun! Off caps!”

The closely packed ranks of men assembled aft on both sides of the quarter-deck bared their heads. Those in the rear craned their necks as if to obtain a better view of the figure standing abaft the turret with one of the Ship’s Police at his side. He was a young Able Seaman with high check-bones and a patch of plaster across the bridge of his nose. He coughed rather self-consciously behind a sunburnt hand and moved his feet a little.

The Commander picked up a frayed pamphlet and a double sheet of blue foolscap from the capstan-grating and cleared his throat.

“Every person subject to this Act who shall be guilty of any profane oath, cursing, execration, drunkenness, uncleanness or other scandalous action in derogation of God’s honour and corruption of good manners shall be dismissed from His Majesty’s Service with disgrace or suffer such other punishment as is herein after mentioned. *On caps!*” A movement rippled over the Divisions as they resumed their headgear. There was a little stillness, broken only by the lapping of water against the clinker-built sides of a boat at the quarter-boom and the rustle of the papers in the Commander’s hand.

“Whereas it has been represented to me by

Commander Edgar Bertram Dallington, D.S.O., Royal Navy, that on the Seventh day of February, 1921, Terence Malone, Able Seaman, One Good Conduct Badge, Not classed for Conduct, First Class for Leave——”

The Commander read fast in a loud even monotone as if repeating a lesson learned by heart.

“——did remain absent over leave thirty-six hours; did create a disturbance ashore; was brought on board drunk; did violently resist escort,

“I do hereby adjudge him the said Terence Malone to be deprived of one Good Conduct Badge, forfeit thirteen days’ pay and thirteen days’ leave stopped.”

The Commander paused and turned the page. The prisoner coughed again and contemplated his bare feet. Something like a ghost of a smile of reminiscence flitted over his mouth and vanished.

“Before awarding the foregoing punishment I did on the tenth day of February personally and publicly, in the presence of the accuser and accused, investigate the matter. And having heard the evidence in support of the charge, as well as what the accused had to offer in his defence, and he calling no one on his behalf, I consider the charges to be substantiated against him, and taking into consideration that these are the third, fourth, fifth and sixth offences registered against him in the Conduct Book, I adjudge him to be punished as afore stated.” The Commander paused for breath.

“Given under my hand on board His Majesty’s Ship *Epsilon* at Ière the tenth day of February,

Nineteen hundred and twenty-one. Rupert M. Thayer, Captain."

The reader folded the paper and glanced at the serried faces; their eyes were on him now.

"Turn forward—Right and left turn! Double *March!*"

Thirty seconds later he stood alone on the quarter-deck. The sun was declining towards the distant mountains of Venezuela and the rays that slanted beneath the awnings lit the retreating form of the prisoner and his escort. Forward of the superstructure they merged into the crowd that was making its way along the upper deck. A bugle somewhere in the battery summoned cooks of messes to their tasks. It was a quarter past four and the day's work was done.

A little breath of cool air, forerunner of the evening breeze, stirred the folds of the White Ensign that had hung limp and lifeless through the burning tropic day. The Commander sat down on the after-capstan, unfastened the collar of his duck tunic, and lit a cigarette. He remembered for the first time that it was the birthday of his eldest unmarried daughter. She was three years old. He sat very still, staring at the sea.

Forward between decks the ship's company were having tea. The cooling influence of the evening breeze had not penetrated here. All day the sun had been beating on the steel plating of the ship's side, and the thermometer on the bulkhead of the Master-at-Arms' curtained mess registered 105 degrees. It did not register the aroma of hot tea, butter melted to liquid, and of crowded, perspiring humanity, which

had the effect of making the sweltering atmosphere seem hotter than it was. A murmured buzz of conversation filled the narrow spaces; the drone of tired men's voices. The ship had been eighteen months in commission, and few men took advantage of leave to go ashore. They were tired of "the beach." The novelty of seeing black faces everywhere, of coconuts and bananas growing untended in the unfenced spaces, of cheap rum and other dubious delights, had worn off. There were men there, contentedly supping hot sweet tea from their basins, who had not been ashore for months. Here and there, however, along the gangway a figure in spotless ducks stood before a bulkhead mirror putting the finishing touches to his toilet in anticipation of the pipe "Libertymen fall-in!" Each was the object of a perfunctory volley of criticism from members of his mess, mock advice and irreproducible speculation as to the nature of his pursuits ashore being thrown in between bites of bread and jam and audibly impeded by mastication.

The gentleman with the strip of plaster across his nose, whose diversions on leave had recently called forth the fulminations of Article 27 of the Naval Discipline Act, was solacing his soul with a plateful of fried eggs. They were not large eggs, as he had rather emphatically pointed out to the Canteen Manager, and he disposed of them in swift sequence, balancing each in turn by some adroit feat of *legerdemain* on the flat of his knife, en route to his mouth.

"Sure it's a quare thing," he observed musingly while he scraped the remnants of the fried eggs off the plate and transferred them to a piece of bread.

"There's me ould feyther, an' him drunk as seven devils ivery Saturday night since he was a shlip av a gossoon. There was not a policeman in County Galway could come near him to hould him. They would not so. It was turnin' their heads, they'd be, the way they'd not see him. Didn't they know it was the ould feller's divarsion of a Saturday night to get drunk, the creature?"

His *vis-à-vis*, buttering a crust by the simple expedient of tilting the tin so that the yellow oil trickled over the bread's surface, nodded sympathetically. The remainder of the mess (by some mysterious process of sound elimination known only to men who live in reverberant surroundings) were intent alone on listening to a recital by the Mess Caterer of a two-month-old murder which he read aloud from a frayed Sunday newspaper.

"Wasn't I after following in me ould feyther's footsteps the ither night, an' it his birthday. An' up comes a dirty spalpeen of a nigger dressed like a policeman whin all I was doin' was havin' a small little argument wid one of them slack-jawed, gum-chewin' Yankees about who was after winnin' the war. 'Is it foightin', faith,' sez I? 'Is it FOIGHTIN' ye calls it? Begob, I'll show ye what foightin' manes, ye haythen!' An' me an' the Yankee had the tunic ripped off the back of him an' his truncheon half-way down his own dirty throat before the patrol lit on us that night. It was me feyther's own birthday, it was, an' may the blessed Saints make his bed in Heaven."

"Did you spin all this yarn to the Bloke when you come up at Defaulters?" queried his solitary

audience, whose interest was being palpably sapped by half-heard allusions to a blood-clotted rolling-pin that was prominent in the Mess Caterer's narrative.

"I did not, faith. Didn't I know he meant to have the badge shtripped off me the minute himself was after clappin' his eyes on me face?"

"Well, now," said his friend soothingly. "Let's listen to Bunchy 'avin' a nice read of the paper. . . ."

"'The learned counsel concludin', characterized it as a foul an' dastardly deed calc'lated to strike 'orror into every civilized community,'" read the Mess Caterer with relish. "'Col'-blooded, *de-liberate*, stamped with every mark of bestiality——'"

"'Ere," interrupted the bread-and-butter eater, "read us out that bit again—the bit about the belayin'—no, the rollin'-pin. Me an' Mikky was spinnin' a yarn; we didn't hear it all plain."

The Mess Caterer cleared his throat.

For the most part few men lingered between decks after their meal. Up on deck it had grown perceptibly cooler. Shadows were invading the depths of the green valleys ashore. A couple of trading schooners in the harbour were weighing anchor and shaking out their sails. To the westward sea and sky were merged in an intolerable brightness. The Wardroom Cook's Mate, who had been peeling potatoes, sat on the coaming of the galley door and stared absently at the mountains behind the town. He was a much-spotted, white-faced youth with a shock of carrotty hair, and he sat so still and so expressionless that it seemed as if his mind had ceased to function. As a matter of fact, his mind was rather

busy. He was wondering if he would ever possess a motor-bicycle; one with a noisy horn and a side-car containing a young lady. He would wear his cap with the peak behind——

“Get on with peelin’ them spuds!” The voice of the Wardroom Cook, playing cribbage with a Chief Stoker on the torpedo tubes hard-by, shattered his meditations. He resumed his task with the same blank abstraction on his face. . . . What’s more, he’d smoke a fag stuck in one of them long holders. . . .

Forward of the torpedo tubes a small group stood in a circle round a diminutive monkey. The monkey scratched itself and eyed its audience with irascible melancholy. The owner of the monkey was a Leading Seaman with small gold earrings and an undraped female form of the Realist School of Art tattooed on his left calf. He contemplated his charge with an air of affectionate pride. “If she could only talk she’d be the same’s a human being,” he observed fondly.

“She ain’t arf one for tricks, eh?” suggested a beholder.

“Tricks! Gorblime, you’d fair bust yourself with laughin’ at some of the things she does. Look at her now!”

“’Untin’ for fleas,” confirmed another of the audience in the tone of one who wished no man to think him backward in appreciating a good thing when he saw it. “Proper cure, ain’t she?” The remainder continued to stand in the attitudes of men momentarily expecting some side-splitting provocation of mirth.

The monkey whimpered peevishly; then, apparently growing tired of this intensive scrutiny, it sprang to a stanchion and thence to the fore-and-aft bridge.

"Emma!" shouted the proprietor. "Come 'ere this minute!" He grabbed at a vanishing tail. The monkey turned and bit him, and proceeded by a series of agile bounds in the direction of the foremast. This roused the hunting instinct in the breasts of Emma's late admirers. Headed by Emma's owner they rushed hot-foot in pursuit. Emma, grateful for this relief from the tedium of a life devoted to eating, sleeping and the annihilation of parasites, kept just out of reach of the hunt. Finally wearying of the sport she swung out along the wireless aerial and dangled head down, chattering derision at her pursuers.

"Didn't I say she was a cure"? demanded her most persistent admirer, wiping his face and gazing skyward. Emma's owner turned on him swiftly, nursing a damaged finger. "You can 'ave 'er," he replied. "She's yours, mate. Cage an' all."

The Authorities had set their faces sternly against pets until the last six months of the commission. The ban once lifted, however, the foremost part of the booms became a menagerie within a week. Parrots of all species and colourings lifted up strident voices from swinging perches. Monkeys sat in melancholy resignation inside home-made cages, doomed to inhale perpetually the savour of baked meats that floated up from the ship's galley just beneath. Sloths, agoutis and even lizards were the objects of

their owners' unceasing solicitude; in the dog-watches amateur zoologists held carnival among their pets. The majority of the latter lived brief if pampered existences, and those that survived did so in the teeth of dietary indiscretions and excesses that would have astonished a Roman Emperor.

A little forward of the searchlight platform a burly stoker and a dejected-looking parrot eyed each other distastefully. From time to time the parrot stirred its ruffled plumage and said something in an undertone.

"If I'd 'a' known," said the stoker bitterly. "If I'd 'a' known you was an adjectival Dago I'd never 'a' bought you. So I wouldn't." He shook his head reproachfully at his possession.

"What's up?" asked a fellow-stoker who leaned against the mounting of the anti-aircraft gun, and having no pet of his own derived a modest enjoyment from watching others ministering to their charges.

"'E can't talk a word of English," said the purchaser, indicating his bargain. "The perishin' nigger what I bought it from last night, swore he talked like a gramophone—an' I 'eard 'im talk too; but bein' as it was late an' I'd 'ad one or two I didn't trouble what 'e said. An' this mornin' blime if the blighter can say anythin' 'cept in some furrin lingo."

The parrot repeated its mournful observation. "That there's what they talks in Venezuela," said the friend. "Bill, you was 'ad by that there nigger."

The parrot put its ruffled head on one side and shifted its hold on the rail. "GODDAMYER-EYES!" it said malevolently. A delighted grin transformed the sour expression of its owner. He

seized the feathered biped and held it to him like a father welcoming an erring son back to forgiveness.

"There you are," said the chum. "What's wrong with that? Good old English, that is!" He scratched the green poll encouragingly. "Garn, cully, chuck it off your chest agin!" The owner proudly extended his forefinger with the bird perched thereon.

"*Aguardiente!*" croaked the parrot hoarsely.

"There's he goes again!" groaned the backslider's lord and master.

"If I was you, Bill," counselled the interpreter, "I'd wring 'is ruddy neck. 'E's blaspheming something awful."

Parrots were not the only birds that ruled the affections of the men. In the shelter of a searchlight platform hung little wooden cages containing canaries, parrakeets, and diminutive birds of varied plumage. Contemplating one of the latter sat an old marine, smoking a pipe. His features might have been cut carelessly out of a block of mahogany with a blunt knife; beetling eyebrows lent it a grim expression of concentration. His eyes, blue in colour and rather kind, never wavered from the bird.

It was a very little bird with black and white feathers, and an air of slightly bored acceptance of its fate. Now and again it uttered a faint cheep and eyed the man inquisitively. The sun descended lower, and to the westward a bank of cloud from nowhere darkened against the intense light that sank to meet the sea. The evening wore on, each passing minute fraught with a growing tranquillity. The

men about the cages put away their pets and drifted forward; the cinema operator was getting his apparatus up on to the forecastle in anticipation of the darkness that would follow so swiftly on the heels of the setting sun.

The old Marine remained on, however, watching the queer little bird through the smoke of his pipe. Finally he rose and moved off heavily without another glance at the occupant of the cage, in the direction of the forecastle. A mail had come that morning. It told him that his wife had run away with a sign-painter from Fratton. He had been thinking things out: in fact, revoked an earlier decision to kill the sign-painter from Fratton—a primitive impulse strengthened temporarily by the one-bell tot of rum; then he had wondered who was looking after the children. But the bird couldn't tell him that.

The Commander was interrupted in his meditations on the after capstan by the appearance up the hatchway of two wardroom servants staggering beneath a table and tea-tray. He eyed the advent of the procession sourly.

“Another damned tea-party?”

“Yessir,” replied the senior Marine servant, who, from his expression, apparently shared the Commander's lack of enthusiasm in the impending entertainment. “Mr. Wilks, sir, an' the Surgeon-Lieutenant-Commander.” He set out the festive array while his companion arranged chairs in a decorous platoon.

“But they had one the day before yesterday!” expostulated the Commander. He caught sight of a

white-garbed, immaculate figure burdened with a gramophone, making his way aft.

"Look here, Torps, what about it? Things are beginning to look sinister. I'm a poor man with a family dependent upon me; I can't afford to give wedding presents once a month."

The new-comer deposited his burden on the capstan; a slightly alarmed expression flitted over his brown face. "There's no danger, sir," he reassured his superior. "Anyhow, this is the P.M.O.'s show."

"You can't shove the responsibility on the P.M.O. They won't catch *him*, though I admit he is going pretty close to the wind. Two bun-worries in three days is about the limit."

"But they're different Belindas each time!" protested the defier of Eros' darts. The Commander rose. "Profligacy. Worse still. Are those jam sandwiches?" He helped himself. "And this——" indicating the gramophone. "This implies that you meditate gyrating each with a helpless virgin clutched in your rude embrace?"

"Er, yes—roughly," admitted the Torpedo Lieutenant, his eyes on the approaching launch. "We thought, perhaps, you'd join us——" he coughed. "There's a chaperon——"

"Say no more. When I was on this station as a bachelor about ten years ago there were also chaperons. The Chief was the only competitor for the rôle of twin gooseberry in my ship." The Commander studied the lines of caulking running forward to the superstructure. "His modest fee was a cock-tail."

"It's yours, sir," said the Torpedo Lieutenant

hastily, and got up as the boat came alongside the after gangway. The Commander strolled in his junior's rear to greet the first of the guests as she came up the ladder. She was a fair-haired, pretty matron of about thirty. The slightly unsettled smile worn by feminine ship visitors after negotiating the ascent of the ladder in a breeze evaporated as the Torpedo Lieutenant waved the Commander forward.

"Surely . . . ?" she began, holding out her hand.

"You?" murmured the Commander. A faintly heightened colour tinged her cheeks; her fugitive smile returned as their hands met in greeting. Two girls followed at her heels and, laughing and chattering, were piloted in the direction of the tea-table by their hosts.

"I didn't know you had come out here again, Gerry," said the chaperon to her escort. He inclined his head affirmatively; his comprehensive glance took in her left hand. "And you're married?"

"Yes. Of course you are?"

"Why 'of course'?" They lingered a moment by the turret, eyeing each other with tolerant smiles, like two quondam fencers facing each other with weapons long grown unfamiliar.

"Oh, just a—'in a way it's a compliment, Starkey!'"

He laughed. "Yes, I am."

"And very happy?"

"Very. And you, Diana?"

"Of course. . . . Now, come along and, after tea, we'll have a nice long talk while these children dance."

"Why 'of course'?" he asked again; but,

apparently, she failed to hear him, for she made no answer.

A couple of hours later the Commander sat at the desk in his cabin writing a letter he was in the habit of adding a little to each day between mails.

"... remembered it was Peggy's birthday. I shall be home for her next one, with any luck.

"Two of our gay bachelors had a tea-party this afternoon, and roped me in—as an old married man and pillar of the proprieties—to entertain the chaperon. She turned out, by a curious coincidence, to be a woman I met when I was out here ten years ago."

He paused and leaned back in his chair, nibbling the end of his penholder. The cigarette smouldering unheeded in a tray at his elbow sent up a slender, wavering spiral of smoke.

A rap at the door startled him out of his brown study. The Torpedo Lieutenant drew back the curtain.

"What about that cocktail, Commander?"

The other gave a short laugh. "On this occasion I have decided, after due deliberation, to waive my customary fee."

When the Torpedo Lieutenant had withdrawn, protesting, the letter-writer read the last sentence over, dipped his pen in the ink and began a fresh paragraph. It had nothing to do with coincidences or the undying past.

* * * * *

The Gunnery Lieutenant and the Paymaster Commander, who were athletically inclined, had

climbed to the top of one of the mountains behind the town to watch the sun set. The smoke of cooking fires in the town below them rose in a thin haze that the rays of the sinking sun tinged with ethereal light. From the trees that clothed the flanks of the mountains came the tinkle of the tree-frogs and the occasional call of a homing bird. The wind-ruffled harbour lay within the shadowy curve of the mangrove swamps like a mirror that had been breathed upon, anchored craft dwarfed to insignificance upon its surface.

The Paymaster, shading his eyes with one hand, indicated with the other the tapering toy that lay at anchor beyond the scattered coasting craft. "Doesn't she look absurdly small at this height! It's difficult to realize that that thing is our ship—our home, in fact."

"Yes," replied the other. "And the home of nearly four hundred men besides." He picked up a pebble and dropped it over the rough stone parapet; it fell clinking down a dry ravine. "And each one of that crowd has his own outfit of personal temptations, hopes, despairs, ideals. . . . Each one the centre of his little Universe: knows his own private and peculiar hell. . . . Supposing we could for a moment see it all. . . ."

The sun dipped beneath the horizon as if jerked by an invisible hand.

"Thank God we can't," said the Paymaster. "Come on, we must be getting back. It gets dark quickly."

III

THE REBEL

I

THEY lay where marsh, sea and sky merged into one grey monochrome broken only by the sails of passing barges. In that bleak desolation nothing happened through the interminable hours save the slow advance and retreat of the tide across the mud-flats; there was never a sound but the crying of the gulls.

The Battle-Cruiser was secured nearest to the sea, and she was the latest arrival. In creeks and backwaters as far as the eye could reach there were lines of Destroyers moored bow to stern in pairs, a few Light Cruisers, a huddle of rusty Submarines. Clear of the fairway in the main estuary the great guns of three Monitors pointed dumbly at a couple of Battleships, whose gun-ports and batteries were as empty as the eyeholes in a skull. The bitter wind that swept out of the north-east at dawn drove soapy flakes of scud back from the tide's advance, shrilled in the rigging of the empty ships and went moaning through hatchways.

The forlorn Destroyers stirred and twitched at their moorings.

"Greeting!" muttered an old Flotilla Leader. Her grey paint was disfigured with rust; her rail stanchions were bent, and the wire sagged along her

foul deck; a rotted signal-halyard streamed out from her yard, cracking and snapping like a whip-lash. Only a few years before, the Leader would have ignored the north-east wind; but in the condemned cell the visitation of even an erstwhile antagonist is welcome: "What's the news from the North Sea?"

"Nothing that would interest you," cried the wind. "The ships go to and fro unescorted: the fishing fleets are thick on the Banks, and they have nothing to fear but me. Rest in peace!"

A Destroyer farther down the line winced and trembled against her fender. "Had Nimri peace . . . ? Blood-guilty! Blood-guilty!—" She was a comparatively new Destroyer. That is to say, she had been built and launched during the War, and in her first year of service had accidentally rammed a sister-ship in her own Flotilla, cutting her in two. The catastrophe had affected her reason, and she now lay on the sale-list, brooding interminably over her brief and tragic career, a miserable, witless thing.

". . . Hither to torment us . . ." The sororicide rambled on in a dull monotone that sent a shiver through the tense hulls. The pitiless wind swept down the line, ruffling the surfaces of the puddles that lay on the rusting steel decks.

"Another dawn!" sighed one of the Mine-Sweepers from an adjoining backwater. Her battered gallows pointed up-harbour where the sunrise was tinging the mist and smoke with sombre colour. "Who clears the fairways these days?"

"The fairways are clear," jeered the wind. "All clear from the Naze to the Lizard."

"The Pentland?" asked another. "Moray Firth

—Tynemouth—the Swin?” She mouthed the old familiar names wistfully.

“They take too much on trust nowadays,” chimed in one of the others. “I said so once before in ’17, but nobody listened. ‘All clear!’ That was what the trawlers reported at sunset, but it cost us a Light Cruiser in the morning. Never trust a fairway till you’ve swept it—that’s what I say.”

“Which reminds me,” began a neighbour. “Talking of the Swin——” and as the thawing dew dripped from rail and funnel-stay they settled down to their daily exchange of War-memories like a row of Chelsea Pensioners sunning themselves on a bench.

In the meanwhile the wind had reached the Battle-Cruiser. She lay with a cable out on either quarter and bow, towering above the discoloured flood, a sullen brooding savage.

The lesser ships in that pitiable assemblage all greeted the wind for old acquaintance’ sake, but the Battle-Cruiser, who had always scorned the north-east wind, remained haughtily indifferent. The wind thrummed softly in her tangled aerals and rigging, rustled along the ventilating shafts, and passed sighing through the armoured doorways. “Here I am!” whispered the wind; “I’ve come back to you.”

The tide turned and the manacled giant stirred restlessly. The wind continued to finger shrouds and halyards, straying along the empty living-spaces and stirring the dust on the bare mess-tables. “I suppose you don’t care—though the others are glad when I come. Don’t you care a little, for the sake of old times—for the sake of the sound of gunfire I brought

you—for the smoke-screen I laid—the mist I rent to give you clear range . . . ?”

The Battle-Cruiser ground her cables in the hawse-pipes. “You brought me nothing I want reminding of here.”

The wind caressed the gaunt axe-head bows with an icy touch. “I have missed you. I come from our hunting-ground—ours by right of conquest! Have you forgotten that everything that moved upon its surface did so by our tolerance? What are you doing here in this pitiable array?”

A rusty Submarine, with the muddy waves chasing each other over her half-submerged tail, laughed weakly as she overheard the wind. “Did you hear that?” she murmured to the others. “Their tolerance, if you please! A noisy draught that wouldn’t move a torpedo an inch in the tube, and a target we could have sunk at seven miles, calling the North Sea their hunting-ground by right of conquest!”

But no answer came from the other boats. Their rudders and hydroplanes had rusted in the sockets, and they could no longer dive. A submarine left neglected dies very soon, and with the exception of the one that had spoken the Spirit had fled from them all. Only surface ships can cling to life as long as they keep afloat.

The two pre-Dreadnought Battleships that had been there longer than any of the other ships were instances of this longevity. Owing to the depth of water they were in, they were allowed to swing to the tides. With senile complacency they surveyed for the thousandth time the sorry pageant stretching away under the bleak skies to where the dock-

yard lay hidden in the mist. They had been there so long (the firm of ship-breakers that had bought them could not afford to tow them away) that they had forgotten the real reason why they were there at all. Battleships age very quickly.

"A pleasant morning for the review," mumbled one. "Is it to-day that the King comes?"

"I think not," replied the other. "I see no flags: the Fleet is not dressed. It must be to-morrow. A brave gathering, is it not? What strides we make! I can remember—dear, dear! I can remember when we only possessed five submarines. And now, look over in yonder creek—they stretch as far as we can see!"

"My sight isn't what it used to be. The dear Prince used to stand on my bridge—I told you the Prince of Wales served on board me as a Midshipman, did I not?—He used to stand on my bridge——"

"We've heard that story before," grunted one of the Monitors irritably. Her sister, moored alongside, nudged her bulging side. "Hush! Let them alone. They're happy enough. They think they're here for a review."

"I'd give my billet in the finest review the world ever saw for another ten minutes' bombardment of the Belgian coast," muttered the third of the trio.

The Depot-ship of the Defence Flotilla at the mouth of the estuary, her comely old sides shining with fresh paint, and her accommodation ladder scoured as white as ivory, joined in the talk. "Belgian coast! Forget it. I was at the Bombard-

ment of Alexandria, but I'd rather be where I am to-day with my children round me. . . . Ah, believe me, hot blood cools! What will be, will be, and God is over all."

"Pious old fraud!" was the Monitor's comment. "Nobody's going to turn *us* into fat Depot-ships. We're for the knacker's yard. Forget the Belgian Coast? Not while a rivet holds two plates together. Hot blood cools, does it? I know somebody's blood that doesn't show much signs of cooling!" They all glanced covertly towards the Battle-Cruiser as she lay smouldering in impotent sullen rage.

"Poor thing!" said the Depot-ship. "She takes it hardly. But in a little while she will forget. . . . Time is a great healer. What will be, will be."

The battle-scarred giant broke silence. "Keep your pity for others—for these senile babblers and rusty cripples. They are content to wait like cattle to be towed out and torn plate from plate. Is that how Time heals, O Bombarder of Alexandria? Hot blood cools for ever in the breaker's yard: is it for *that* men bid me wait in this sorry company, while the rust reddens on my decks and the weed grows fouler along my keel, tasting death between each dawn and sunrise through the endless years, until one day in mercy the tugs come . . . ?"

None answered her passionate outburst: but suddenly the wind, shrilling in the rigging, cried: "Look! Look up the harbour, and see one about to taste man's mercy!"

Out of the haze veiling the distant dockyard came a Dreadnought. She passed slowly down the fairway in the wake of a pair of tugs, whose black

smoke trailed to leeward like a pall. Gunless, stripped of boats and fittings, her top-masts struck, a certain pathetic dignity still clung to her.

The voice of the afflicted Destroyer rose babbling to the sky : "Few and evil have been the days of my pilgrimage. . . . Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear. . . . I did not strike the depth-charges—the depth-charges. . . . Thou art witness, O Lord, the loss of life was small. . . . How long, then, oh my God. . . . ?"

"For pity's sake keep silence!" entreated the others, and the wails died away to incoherent mumbling as the Dreadnought approached the watching craft.

"Butchered to make a Naval Holiday!" observed one of the Monitors sententiously, and there was an oppressive silence until after the tow had disappeared in the sea-haze.

"Well?" murmured the wind to the Battle-Cruiser, "Are you fain to wait for such an end as that?"

"By the God of Battles!" was the passionate reply, "Man shall not lay a finger upon me—man that made me: man that I served in the name of the King." The great super-structure, towering sixty feet above the water, trembled as she tugged unavailingly at her cables.

"I can show you the way to freedom," whispered the treacherous wind out of the north-east. "We twain are fitting mates, and I can give you again the freedom of the seas and power and dominion over them. Trust in me, and we will show man that the end is not yet."

2

One of the two pensioner ship-keepers on board the Battle-Cruiser looked up from his task of toasting a kipper before the fire in the Admiral's day-cabin as the door opened and his mate came in.

"Fair give you the 'orrors, don't she, a night like this?" The new-comer closed the door against a furious blast of icy wind and carefully extinguished a hurricane lamp he was carrying.

The other, a stolid, thick-set figure wearing leather sea-boots, with the firelight lighting up his heavy features, nodded. "Bower cable all clear for lettin' go the anchor?"

"All clear." The man addressed set the lamp on the table and stood warming his hands by the fire. His mate examined the kipper and turned it on the fork. "They didn't ought to leave us 'ere a night like this," pursued the speaker. "Them cables won't hold 'er, not if the wind backs with the ebb tide. Highest tide ever *I* see in this river."

"They couldn't send nothin' to take us off since sunset day before yesterday. It's been blowin' a full gale."

The man who had just entered stared absent-mindedly at the wavering flame of a candle stuck in an empty beer-bottle on the littered oval table. He was tall and lean, with stooping shoulders; a goatee beard flecked with grey jutted out of the opening of a khaki "balaclava" that covered his head. The firelight threw his distorted shadow, in the semblance of a monstrous brooding bird of prey, across the curve of the after-bulkhead. He appeared to be listening

intently to the sounds that reached them through the closed mahogany door : the tumult of the wind howling through the empty shell of the ship, and the noise of the sea breaking against her side. "The 'oly 'orrors," he said, reverting to his first comment. The ship shuddered as if reeling under a titanic blow.

"Ain't you used to empty ships ? " asked the stolid man, straightening up and placing the kipper on top of a pile of others on a plate. "By this time ? "

"You walk forward 'tween decks," was the reply. "You'd think there was a whole ship's company there in the dark, ravin' an' cursin'. . . . I ain't a nervis man, not meself, or I'd never have took the job, but a night like this aboard this hooker fair beats 'aunted churchyards."

The stout man filled the teapot and moved heavily towards the table, carrying the plate of kippers. A sombre reflection in the mirror above the wide side-board sprang to sudden life.

"An' what's more," continued the thin man, gloomily eyeing the preparations for the repast, "if it wasn't for my daughter Annie bein' musical an' wantin' a pianner on the 'ire purchase, I wouldn't stop aboard 'er another night."

The stolid man drew a stool up to the table and poured himself out a cup of tea. "It won't be your daughter Annie to say when you leaves this ship. This gale ain't goin' to blow itself out under a week. . . . 'Ear that ? " A sudden sharp jar ran through the framework of the Battle-Cruiser. "They never calkerlated on the tide risin' to this height when they laid out them four moorin's. There's a big sea

runnin' an' she's bringin' up heavy against 'er cables."

"What's made the tide so high?" asked the thin man. He cut himself some bread and ate it, moving restlessly about the cabin. A dull reflection of his stooping figure moved stealthily to and fro in the mirror.

"North-easterly gale and spring tide. Piles up the water in the estuary. There's floods everywhere ashore. I see dead sheep an' pigs comin' down on this afternoon's ebb."

Again the table shook to the jar of the ship. The muffled sound of the sea breaking against the side changed to a more confused medley of noises. Tremor succeeded tremor in the ship's structure. "Tide's turned," said the stout man, speaking with his mouth full.

The tall man looked round the shadowy great cabin lit fitfully by the firelight and the single smoky candle. "It's snug in 'ere," he said, as if coming to the end of a train of thought. He accepted a cup of tea from his mate and held a punctured tin of condensed milk over it, watching the thin yellowish stream that trickled into the cup.

"Drink that down," said the stout man. "We've got to get on deck." He rose masticating, and taking a duffel coat off a hook on the bulkhead, drew it on, breathing heavily. About his throat he wound turn upon turn of a worsted comforter, and finally donned a battered sou'-wester. His movements were deliberate and methodical; having searched his pockets for matches and found them, he lit two hurricane lamps.

The thin man drank his tea with a gusty sucking noise, keeping his eyes fixed on the wavering candle flame over the brim of his cup, as if mesmerized by it.

"Come on," said the man in sea-boots abruptly, and picking up one of the lamps, opened the door. A sudden draught swept in from the obscurity of the ship's interior, extinguishing the candle. The thin man, seemingly released from a spell, put down his cup with a clatter, seized the other lamp and followed his mate, closing the door behind him.

The darkness seemed to press forward against them; the empty spaces of the ship were reservoirs of blackness flowing upon them from all sides. Waves of gloom receded from the swaying lamps and rolled back like a heavy curtain behind them. The gale sighed and moaned through the empty compartments, gibbering in ventilating shafts with a horrid similitude of human voices. The wind-swept steel shell was bitterly cold.

The stout man led the way up a clattering steel ladder and stepped out on to the vast quarter-deck; after the thick darkness below, it was comparatively light in the open air. The steel rigging hummed on one deep continuous note as the gale tore through it; a loosened tarpaulin somewhere in the darkness flapped like the wings of a great bird struggling for freedom. The two men stepped over the hatchway coaming to feel the ship shudder from bow to stern. The shorter of the pair raised his stolid face to the sky where the clouds were racing past.

"As you said," he shouted to his companion. "Wind's backed to the west'ard." He put his hand on the other's rounded shoulder, bawling in his ear.

"Backed to the west'ard with the ebb. . . . Can't hold 'er. . . . Bower anchor. . . ." The gale tore fragments of sentences from his lips and annihilated them. The thin man, staring to windward, steadied himself against the onslaught of the wind by holding on to a stanchion.

Without more ado the stout man suddenly bent forward and set off into the darkness at a shambling run. He shouted something, but the words were lost in the uproar of the wind. His swaying lantern danced like a will-o'-the-wisp along the upper-deck and vanished behind a gun-shield.

"Cable's parted," muttered the other, and made off after his mate, his aggressive beard splayed out by the wind in the semblance of a shaving-brush. He clawed his way up the ladder to the forecastle in time to feel the ship jerk like an angry dog that has charged to the limit of its chain. He halted and stood irresolutely, peering; all of a sudden the wind, from blowing full in his face, was on his cheek; a distant anchor-light on one of the craft moored up harbour began to swing rapidly from right to left.

"There's the other bridle gone!" He swore under his breath and stumbled towards the gleam of the lantern in the bows. The stout man was bending over something on the deck; there was a clink of metal.

"Stand clear of the cable!" He guessed rather than heard the purport of the shout that barely reached him a couple of yards away; in the lantern light he saw the stout man step back and swing the iron maul. A sharp clang was succeeded by a deafening roar as the released anchor fell, dragging the

cable thundering from the echoing depths of the ship. He dropped his lantern and made for the capstan and compression gear. The cable was bounding through the navel-pipe at a speed which warned him that the ship's bows, driven by wind and tide, were swinging rapidly across the fairway. The stupendous uproar, as the gigantic steel links rattled through the hawse, drowned even the howling of the gale. He was aware of the stout man at his side, striving to impart information between his cupped hands.

" . . . Out to a cinch . . . broadside on . . . can't hold her . . . rockets——"

The sudden cessation of the thunderous vomiting of cable came with a jerk that shook the forecastle. There was an instant's renewal of the uproar and a comparative silence. "'Old on!" shouted the stout man. "That's the bower cable parted, an' I think one of the stern moorin's went same time. There's only one cable holdin', an' she ain't swung to that yet."

"Where's the rockets an' Very's pistol?" bel-
lowed the other.

"Chart-'ouse." Without further parley the stout man set off again at his heavy shambling run, followed by his mate. Both lamps had been extinguished, and they felt their way by sense of touch up tier after tier of the ladder that led to the fore-bridge. The full force of the gale clawed at their garments and buffeted them against each other as they groped for the door of the chart-house; the stout man flung back the sliding panels and in the blackness of the musty-smelling interior could be heard gasping for breath and swearing. A match splut-

tered, flared up, and revealed the rockets on a shelf. He passed an armful out to his companion. "Go ahead—socket's on the lee rail." He struck another match and jerked open drawer after drawer in the chart-table, searching for the Very's pistol. As he found it the first rocket soared, curving upwards through the gale. Two followed in quick succession. He crammed a cartridge into the pistol and rushed to the rail.

"She's adrift!" screamed the thin man, preparing another rocket with shaking hands.

"Go easy with the rockets, then," was the reply. "We shall want 'em all before the night's out. Let's give 'em a Very's light." He raised the heavy brass pistol and fired into the howling darkness.

The wind carried the ball of white flame over the estuary. The Battle-Cruiser's outline sprang into an instant's relief, funnels, turrets and superstructure suddenly assuming monstrous proportions out of the blackness of the night. The foam-streaked water stretched away under the momentary glare, as if viewed from the edge of a high cliff. The hulls of the moored Battleships and Monitors appeared to be receding swiftly. The Very's light reached the water and was extinguished. In the succeeding inky darkness the fury of the gale sounded redoubled.

"*Adrift in the fairway!*" yelled the thin man, as if trying to drive home some insistent point in an argument.

"Orl right! Not likely to be much traffic." The stout man retreated to the shelter of the chart-house and reloaded the pistol; apparently loth to be deprived of human companionship the other joined him.

"Wonder if she'll ground anywhere?" mused the stout man. "Top of the ebb; not likely." He sat down heavily on the settee with the air of a fatalist accepting the inevitable. In the comparative calm of the interior his laboured breathing sounded loud and painful.

"You 'ain't got a fill o' baccy, 'ave you?" he asked presently.

"No," replied the thin man, and there was silence again, broken by the sound of heavy breathing.

"'Ow fast d'you reckon she's travellin'?" asked the thin man presently.

"Matter o' five knots—six, mebbe. I wish I 'ad a fill o' baccy."

The thin man picked up a rocket and vanished on to the bridge. A moment later his tall, stooping form again blocked the faintly perceptible oblong of the doorway. "The lightship!" he shouted.

The other was on his feet in an instant. "Eh? What about the lightship?"

"Bearin' down on it. We're as likely to foul it as not." The speaker turned and vanished. A moment later another rocket spurted and fled hissing into the sky.

"Proper picnic!" The stout man clumped across to the rail, dragging the heels of his heavy boots as he walked. The distant scattered lights ashore showed that the Battle-Cruiser was drifting nearly broadside-on to wind and tide; on the lee beam two or three miles away a white light swung patiently through its appointed arc, paused, and travelled back again.

In the confusion of the gale, the tumult of the wind-scourged sea and the sense of crazy helplessness

as they drifted swiftly through the darkness, the measured wheeling of that beam of light seemed to the two men the only ordered thing in the Universe. They stared at it as if it offered a return to the accepted order of things, a promise of permanence and security. It grew rapidly closer, and the Battle-Cruiser, as if prompted to a purpose of incredible wickedness by the thin man's shout, slowly turned her bows towards it.

Another rocket enveloped the masthead in a shower of stars. It appeared to galvanize the stout man into a sudden extraordinary fit of rage.

"Damn 'er," he roared. "We'll be adrift in the Channel sinkin' shippin' an' Gawd knows what in 'arf an hour. Fireworks won't 'elp 'em. There's an axe in the chart-'ouse. . . . We must light a flare top o' monkey's island. Paraffin's aft on the quarter-deck. There's a month's supply there for the lamps. Fetch it forward—fetch it forward while I get the axe." He rushed into the chart-house, and a moment later a rain of blows and the splintering of woodwork drove the meaning of his incoherencies into the other's brain. A bonfire! That's what he meant! A bonfire to warn shipping. The thin man tumbled down the ladder as if hunted by the devil, and in a few minutes reappeared panting with a tin of paraffin. The stout man was still in the chart-house, wielding the axe as if possessed. "Pile it up topside an' set it alight," he shouted, flinging out fragments of chart-table, drawers and window-frames. His frenzied energy inspired his companion. He staggered up the ladder to the compass-platform under successive loads of wood which he flung in a heap and deluged with

paraffin. The stout man joined him presently, axe in hand, his breath coming and going as if through a pair of leaky bellows. His transport of rage had passed as suddenly as it appeared.

"You didn't think to bring up my prick o' baccy, I s'pose, along o' the paraffin?"

"No," replied the thin man on his knees by the pile of wood, fumbling with a box of matches. He looked up at the other and saw a pale illumination pass slowly over his shadowy outline. For a moment the stolid features were visible between the sou'wester and the multiple folds of the comforter.

The lightship! For some obscure reason they had both forgotten the lightship. The thin man dropped the burning match into a pool of paraffin and sprang to his feet, gazing to leeward. Right ahead of them the beam of the light swung through its unhurried orbit. With a crackling roar the pile of varnished woodwork at their feet burst into a column of flame.

"She's goin' to do it! She means to do it!" bellowed the thin man, attributing for the first time deliberately malevolent intent to the inanimate steel structure adrift beneath their feet. "An' there's livin' men aboard of 'er."

"Gawd 'elp 'em, then. *We* can't do nothin'." The stout man stared with curious apathy at the approaching light. "Thirty thousand tons o' metal at five knots, bows-on. . . ."

The wind tore at the pile of blazing woodwork and drew streamers of flame and sparks trailing to leeward; the smoke of the conflagration enveloped both men and drove them coughing down to the bridge.

"Come forward on to the fore-castle an' bring a line," urged the thin man; "maybe we can save some of 'em." The possibility that the Battle-Cruiser might after all drift clear of the lightship had not seemed to occur to either. The stout man nodded, accepting the certainty of the catastrophe with dispassionate composure, as if he and the thin man had been contemplating its approach from another planet, infinitely remote.

The Battle-Cruiser, driven by the gale and swift currents, was travelling faster than either had estimated. The two men had barely reached the fore-castle, carrying between them a coil of rope from the boat-deck, when they saw the glare right ahead as if pivoted on the jack-staff. The blinding beam wavered in its swing and was suddenly extinguished. In a momentary lull in the gale they heard a splintering crash; the great lantern had fallen, as the lightship's mast went by the board, on to the fore-castle of the Battle-cruiser.

The two men ran stumbling to where, amid a litter of wrecked metal, lay the shattered mirrors and lenses of the lantern. The thin man leaned over the rail, shouting vainly into the darkness. In the tumultuous sea below fragments of wreckage were dimly discernible drifting clear of the sheering bows, but no human voice answered the shouts. From first to last the wheeling light had been the only visible testimony to life on board the lightship.

The thin man turned to his stolid companion. "She's a murderess, this ship," he yelled. "That's what she is! She 'adn't no call to do that. . . . Sunk in their beds: men with wives an' families,

same's you an' me. . . . Jest devilment—pure bloody-minded devilment. . . .”

The effort to make himself heard above the wind exhausted the thin man; his voice cracked on a high falsetto note. One arm he had raised to gesticulate dropped to his side; he thrust his goatee beard into the other's face. “An', what's more, she means to do for *us!*”

“I ain't afraid of 'er,” shouted the stout man. “Let 'er wreck 'erself. Don't frighten me. Sit an' smoke my pipe till the lifeboat comes. She ain't goin' to sink.” He turned and began to walk aft laboriously against the gale.

The flare on top of the chart-house still burned fiercely, vomiting clouds of sparks. They had the effect of again rousing the stout man into one of his abrupt unexpected passions. He pointed upwards to the flare.

“Don't matter about us—we can't come to no 'arm. Warn shippin'—that's what we've got to do. We're right in the traffic-way. . . . More wood! Side-screens—tarpaulins—anything that'll burn!” He lumbered gasping up the ladder. “*Mess stools!*” he roared at the other over his shoulder as he climbed. The thin man turned and fled into the darkness.

The gale veered again about midnight to the north-east, driving the Battle-Cruiser towards a rock-bound lee-shore; she drifted rapidly through the darkness like a citadel on the angry face of the waters; the wind made play with the flames that crowned her as if with a garland of leaping fire.

3

In the pale winter sunlight the Battle-Cruiser lay aground on the isolated patch of rocks where the gale had hurled her. She had grounded on the top of one tide, and had been lifted higher by the succeeding one. The rocks had gnawed their way through her bottom plating, and held her beyond the power of man to refloat her. The seas had swept over her and battered in her scuttles; they had poured through hatchways and shell-gratings, flooding her engine-room, sluicing fore and aft the empty mess-decks, triumphing brutally at the last like a vengeful army after the fall of a long-beleaguered fortress.

The gale exhausted its fury at length, and as the sea calmed down peace seemed to descend upon the stranded ship. Rust had covered her as white hairs are said to come in a night of mortal anguish, and the spindrift of the flying wave-crests glistened like hoar-frost about her upper-works and turrets. Gulls sunned themselves on her listing forecastle, and sea-lice swarmed up over her plates to bask in the brief warmth of the winter days.

Man had disturbed her outwardly but little. A motor lifeboat had braved the gale and sent a line on board on a rocket, by means of which the two ship-keepers had been rescued from the control-top. They appeared little the worse for their adventure; one, a tall, gaunt man with an aggressive beard, seemed to have had small relish for his late abode—indeed to cherish a peculiar animosity for her. Getting him into the lifeboat was like separating the combatants in a brawl; he barely waited until he was hauled in-

board before he broke into a volley of invective, shaking a gnarled fist at the towering bulk over which the sea broke, slowly growing visible in the dawn. His companion, of a more stolid humour, lamented the loss of his sea-boots (discarded for the transit), and borrowed a chew of tobacco from the lifeboat's coxswain before he wrung the water out of his clothes.

The weeks passed; dockyard tugs came out at low water and disembarked various officials and salvage experts on the slippery rocks; men walked round her and shook their heads. An adventurous bluejacket climbed up the length of broken cable that dangled from a fairlead aft, and lowered a Jacob's ladder over her quarter. Men prowled about her interior and conferred amid the sodden litter in the Admiral's cabin. They said the cost of salvage would be greater than her price on the sale-list. Gunnery experts sat astride her mammoth guns debating on her utility as a fleet experimental target. Working parties and floating cranes laboured round her at high water for a while, and finally, stripped to the steel shell, she was abandoned.

Thereafter succeeded utter peace. Night or day, storm or calm, ebb or flood, they were all alike to her. The rust on her plates reddened; the gulls, growing more confident as the weeks passed, collected in flocks about her decks. The sunken lightship was replaced, and once every eleven seconds through the unnumbered night watches the beam of the distant light rested momentarily on the giant funnels and gaunt tripod masts that rose far above the surface of the sea.

Man her creator and master, man her slave and victim, had forsaken her. Then one sunny morning

when the gulls were wheeling overhead and the crisp salt wind was drying the moisture of overnight on her rusting decks, a division of Battleships came up-Channel. They were very far away, and their smoke barely stained the clear sky as they passed in line ahead, turned in echelon, and recrossed the distant horizon. A yellow glare blinked from the leading ship and a dull concussion travelled faintly across the water.

The roar of a great explosion shook the Battle-Cruiser from end to end. Flame, smoke and debris leaped out of a great cavity where once the after-funnel had stood. The yellow flashes blinked all along the line; the rumble of gunfire rolled across the water, and amid a cloud of smoke and fragments of metal flying broadcast the foremast toppled slowly over. Salvo followed salvo; the wind that had been blowing lightly from the north-east died away. The smoke and fumes of the high-explosive covered the Battle-Cruiser as a sheet is drawn over the face of the dead.

Darkness succeeded the short winter day, and the passionless glare of the lightship's beam swung to and fro, illuminating every eleven seconds for a brief instant a heap of distorted metal-work, about which the tide sobbed in unappeasable and subdued lamentation.

IV

A BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY

I

CLARISSA and George came round to our diggings one night after dinner, and there was in the eye of the former an expression you might expect to see in the eye of a thoroughbred two-year-old half-way through the ploughing of a ten-acre field.

"I'm bored with Southsea, and housekeeping," she announced. "I'm fed up—we're both fed up, aren't we, George?"

George grunted an affirmative and rootled among the bottles in the corner by the sideboard.

"One's methylated spirits, one's sherry, and the other is some stuff Rinetta cleans her shoes with," I said. "Help yourself."

"Get a tooth-mug from the bedroom," added Rinetta. "We daren't ring the bell for glasses for fear we get notice to quit."

I nodded at Clarissa. "That's how we feel. Now go ahead and suggest something. They've found America, or we might go and look for that. We've only got Saturday and Sunday, which isn't long enough for a caravan trip. I can't fly; what shall it be?"

"Beaulieu River," mumbled George over the rim of the tooth-glass. We gazed at him.

"Go on," said Clarissa. "Tell them."

"We've bought a yacht," explained her husband modestly.

"Bought a yacht?" we echoed. "Bought a—— Oh, say it again!"

"Well, not so much bought it as hired it. Hired it for the week-end. It's not exactly a yacht; it's more of a boat, really," faltered Clarissa.

"Belongs to a dockyard matey," explained the lessee. "Quid a day. But it's got a cabin of sorts, and a roller reefing gear and a Primus stove. Three tonner."

"And a name," persisted his wife. "She's called the *Speedwell*. We'll all have to sleep on board her on Saturday night."

I saw Rinetta's lips moving as she rolled the name round her tongue. The notion of possessing even a fourth part (and that for forty-eight hours only) of a boat with a name was obviously ensnaring her fancy. Then her mind swung into a more familiar channel. "But what shall we wear to sleep in?"

George and I waived the question aside as mere feminine frivolity. "We're all for it," I said. "Clarissa, do you know anything about boat-sailing?"

"Rather! I know 'Luff, boy, luff!' and how to tie a reef-knot."

"That's good enough," said George. He indicated my helpmate. "What about *her*?"

"What she knows about boat-sailing," I said proudly, "you could dandle on a bee's knee."

"Passed!" said George. "Both of 'em."

"If two fat and able-bodied Naval Officers can't sail two frail and beautiful women from Portsmouth Harbour to the Beaulieu River——" began Rinetta.

"Enough," I interrupted. "The food question demands your entire attention."

"Oh, lists!" murmured Clarissa voluptuously. "Let's make lists. It's so much easier if we both write down what we've each got to get." She settled down at the table with a ream of my best foolscap and a stump of indelible pencil. "I'll write down all the things beginning with 'A.'"

"Now, look here," said George. "We aren't playing Round Games. Pull yourself together——"

"Silence, oaf!" She moistened the indelible pencil recklessly on her lips. "I can't think of anything——"

"I'll do the 'B's,'" said Rinetta quickly. "Butter, biscuits——"

"Beer," from George.

"Baccy." (My brainwave.)

"Bananas, beetroot, beehives, bunions—— Oh, this is easy!" cried George. "Here, give me a dictionary——"

"Oh, *will* you keep quiet!" moaned Clarissa. "How *can* you expect us to settle things to-night if you two keep on like a pair of idiots?"

"Talking of beer . . ." I said, and made for the door.

When I came back George was poring over a chart he had brought with him and had now unrolled on the carpet. We lay side by side on our stomachs, and, with the aid of the Channel Pilot, felt in about ten minutes that we were as good as moored off Buckler's Hard.

"The thing is," said George, puffing little spirals of smoke into the carpet, "to commit the leading-

marks to memory. There's never room to unroll a chart in the stern of a small boat beating into a narrow entrance when you're tied up in the main sheet and you've got to steer with one hand and pull the centre-board up with the other—eh?"

I agreed that that was undoubtedly the thing to do.

"We shall be right up in the middle of the New Forest, shan't we?" asked Rinetta over her shoulder. "Won't it be lovely!"

George rolled up the chart and finished the beer. "Now then, Clarissa, got to Z yet? Because I'm going home. 'Z' stands for—what *does* Z stand for?"

"Tin-opener," I said. "I bet they've forgotten the tin-opener."

"We had," admitted Clarissa. "Give the gentleman a bag of nuts."

George stood up. "The day after to-morrow, then. I'll go down early and get the boat ready. You three had better collect the gear in a taxi and bring it down to the Gosport ferry after breakfast. Ready, Clarissa?"

Clarissa gathered her lists together with a pre-occupied air. ". . . for lunch on Sunday there'll be the rest of the pork-pie and a tin of salmon. George, do you *really* understand the inmost workings of a Primus stove?"

"To your tents, O Israel!" replied George.

2

We got our first glimpse of the *Speedwell* from a waterman's boat as she lay at her moorings off Gosport Hard. Clarissa, her head emerging from a

pyramid of rugs, cooking utensils and foodstuffs in the stern, announced that she looked rather small. I explained that the *Renown*, moored alongside the South Railway Jetty in readiness to take the Prince of Wales to India, had a dwarfing effect upon her. "Shut your right eye," I suggested, "and look at her through your fingers. She looks much bigger then."

Rinetta merely stared in silence. "Where are we going to sleep?" she demanded.

"In the cabin, of course." I began to see behind George's noble impulse to get up early and get the boat ready, leaving the more chivalrous task of squiring dames to me.

"Is that the cabin?" inquired Rinetta. "That thing like the roof of a rabbit-hutch sticking up——?"

"Don't point," I said. "It's rude. Look at the *Victory*, Nelson's flagship at the battle of Trafalgar. It's one of the Old Wooden Walls of England. Over there on Gosport beach a highwayman was once hanged in chains, and one night——"

"There's George," exclaimed Clarissa. She waved a frying-pan impulsively. George's head and shoulders appeared out of the well. A streak of soot ornamented his left cheek and he looked warm. We bumped alongside the *Speedwell*.

"I wonder who invented Primus stoves?" he remarked with a detached air as we rained rugs and tinned comestibles upon him.

"Why?" asked Clarissa. "Catch! Oh, be careful, those are the eggs!" We climbed inboard, and Rinetta, elevating her nose, sniffed. "What a smell of burning!"

"It's not burning now," said George. "It was one of the cushions. I can't think why they stuff them with things that smell so beastly when they burn. Clarissa, if you've got nothing better to do, you might take in the slack of the boom topping-lift and turn up with it round that cleat on the port side of the mast."

Clarissa eyed him coldly. "Now, look here," said she. "Let's come to a clear understanding before we start. If you want me to do anything with all these bits of string, you've got to talk plain English. We don't want any nonsense about port, and starboard, and topping-lifts." She turned to Rinetta. "Do we?"

"No," said Rinetta. "Certainly not. They're only doing it to show off." She lost her balance and sat down swiftly, as the *Speedwell* rocked in the swell of a passing launch. "Can't we start soon? This little boat is wobbling about dreadfully."

George and I were hoisting the mainsail. "What little boat?" I demanded between clenched teeth. "Hush," murmured my fellow-hoister, "she means the *Speedwell*. High 'nough." We went forward and hauled in the slack of the cable until the anchor was up and down.

"Clarissa," shouted George in honied accents. "Push that bit of stick over to the left and hold it there till I come."

"What bit of stick?"

"He means the rudder," explained Rinetta. She grasped the tiller and put it hard a-starboard.

"The other way, dearest," said George. The anchor appeared above the surface and we shot out into the stream.

We were in the Solent at length; it sparkled alluringly in the sunlight and was dotted with the white sails of yachts. George lifted up his voice in song; I was at the tiller watching a pilot-cutter ahead that seemed to be sailing a point closer to the wind than we could, and wondering how she did it.

"It's that beastly dinghy we're towing," said George tactfully. "It makes her like a crab." He took another pull on the main sheet. Rinetta's head emerged from the cabin door.

"What's this thing sticking up in the middle of the cabin floor with a chain on it?"

George checked his song. "Centre-board."

"Why?" asked Clarissa.

"Well, you lower it down, and it sticks out under the keel. Helps you to sail closer to the wind."

An awful suspicion entered my mind. I elevated my eyebrows interrogatively at George and nodded towards the cabin. He descended, and a moment later the grinding of a chain and a jerk shook the boat. George emerged grinning with his finger to his lips.

"Oh!" crowed Clarissa. "They forgot to lower the centre-board. Rinetta, do you think we are quite safe in the hands of these two amateur yachtsmen?" She eyed her husband. "And you a Commander with a tin hat you haven't paid for yet."

"We didn't have centre-boards in the Navy in our young days," I cut in quickly.

"And what about getting us some lunch," added her husband, "instead of chattering."

They fell to peeling potatoes while George led the stove by its ear into the open stern-sheets. Rinetta watched him with interest.

"You might explain to me how it works. One never knows when one will find oneself alone with a mad Primus."

"It's quite easy," said George. "You dope it with methylated spirits, wait till the effect of the anæsthetic has worn off and then pump like fury." He suited the action to the word, and the ruddy flames shot skyward.

"There you are, you see—simple enough. Properly speaking, according to the owner, the flame ought to be blue, but you can't have everything for a quid a day—and the dinghy thrown in."

"Humorous, isn't he?" said Clarissa, who had just burnt her fingers testing the bacon in the frying-pan. "Now then, ladies and gentlemen, lunch is ready."

I glanced at Rinetta. She was sitting with her eyes on the misty distances of Spithead astern; the dregs of a smile that hadn't the energy to evaporate still clung wanly to her lips.

"Lunch, Rinetta!" I said.

"I can smell it," she replied faintly, and continued to gaze astern.

"Have some bread and a fried egg."

Her response was to change her position to the lee side of the boat. We watched these ominous tactics in silence. "Have some bread, then. Just plain bread." She shot a baleful glance at me.

"Leave me alone."

We fell to with Hunnish gusto, and Rinetta,

in the parlance of metaphor, turned her face to the wall.

The wind freshened as the afternoon wore on, and we thrashed our way stubbornly to windward against a steep troublesome sea. Once we hove to to enable us to take in a reef, and as the *Speedwell's* head fell away from the wind again, Clarissa, who for some time had been looking pensive, joined Rinetta on the lee thwart. . . .

It was late in the afternoon when we brought the coast-guard station abeam and wore to enter Beaulieu River. An ugly sea was breaking along the submerged bar, and, but for the unmistakable leading-marks ashore, I should have said that we had mistaken the place. Anything less like the entrance to a river I never remember.

We hauled up our centre-board as a precaution (one we remembered with devout thankfulness later on) and sped towards a dead lee shore in all the valour of total ignorance. A weed-grown beacon went by on the port side like a telegraph pole past a train. A yellow beach with broken groins sticking out of it, a white-washed coast-guard station and a clump of trees rushed to greet us with what seemed to me undue effusiveness. George, forward, was shouting something about the leading-marks. I caught the word "wrong."

"Where's the river?" I roared in reply. Some inane words of a song ("The Jolly Bargee," I think), about "The river, the river, the jolly old river," hammered themselves to bits against the roof of my brain, and I realized that unless we did something

quickly we should be in the middle of the coast-guard's cabbage patch. There were only two things to do—one was to bring her up into the wind, the other to wear. I chose the latter, and began paying out the main sheet to find Rinetta inextricably entangled in the slack. I changed my mind, reversed the helm, and the *Speedwell*, after shaking her head mutinously, missed stays. The next moment we were bumping about in the middle of the broken groins and still more broken surf, hopelessly aground.

Clarissa afterwards assured me that the women and children behaved splendidly. I have to take her word for it, being enveloped in the descending main-sail and in no position to form a dispassionate criticism. George was over the side up to his chin in water, trying to push the *Speedwell's* bows towards the sea, and a crowd of spectators quickly formed ashore along the road that skirted the sea wall. Where the majority came from I haven't the remotest idea; but it included two coast-guards who had evidently quitted their teas with some reluctance and were having difficulty in lighting their pipes in the strong wind.

To these picturesque wardens of the shore George addressed himself between mouthfuls of salt water. "Get into the dinghy, can't you?" he roared. "And lay out our anchor." He shouted some other things, but I will not mar the solemn impressiveness of this story by repeating them.

Now the said anchor had been dropped some time previously, and the cable, thanks to the delirious gyrations of the *Speedwell*, had wound itself in and

out of the weed-grown baulks of timber in a pattern I felt would commend itself to the designer of a jigsaw puzzle. By the time the coast-guards had ferried themselves and the dinghy to the scene of operations we had disentangled the cable and coaxed the anchor out of its lurking place in the weed. It was a hectic five minutes, in no wise gladdened by an apparent determination on the *Speedwell's* part to impale us on the groins as we laboured beneath her plunging bows.

The preliminaries of salvage were, however, finally completed. We manned the cable, and, hand over hand, hauled the reluctant *Speedwell* up to windward. The chagrin of the spectators at being baulked of a more sensational finale to the drama was evident. A motor-car full of veiled and goggled tourists had drawn up and produced field-glasses and a tea-basket with a view to enjoying the spectacle at leisure.

"Brutes!" ejaculated Clarissa, recovering the power of articulate speech. "I hope they'll puncture all the way home."

"*And* soot up their sparking-plugs," added Rinetta, invoking the calamity with which she was most familiar, the while glaring savagely over the taffrail.

George, who had returned from ferrying the coast-guards ashore, made the dinghy's painter fast and climbed inboard.

"I think we'll pass on the Beaulieu River!" he announced, wringing the water out of his trousers. "It's a dead beat up the channel, and the tide is falling."

"And," added Rinetta dolefully, "the harbour bar is moaning."

We surveyed the expanse of grey, tumbling sea and the black clouds banked to windward. "It's moaning something frightful," I agreed. "I'm for Cowes and getting our clothes dried. Does the Soviet approve?"

"Approved," said George between chattering teeth.

For a boat of the *Speedwell's* size a biggish sea was running by the time we had weighed anchor and set sail once more. Clarissa contrived to get the Primus going and brewed hot coffee, while we raced, reeling and wallowing, to leeward. Rinetta sat with her arms on the gunwale and her head bowed upon them, a figure of almost classic grief. Clarissa, having handed us our mugs with averted face, likewise bowed her head. . . . And so, in the phrase beloved of historical novelists, the long day wore on.

We were half-way across when George called my attention to the sunset. All the sky astern was sullen with heaped-up cloud, but above the horizon a single shaft of crimson light streamed through a rent in the blackness. Slowly the rift broadened, wider spread the beams, tinging the surface of the lowering clouds with purple, edging each foam-crested wave with blood and flame. The burning splendour of it nearly took my breath away, and I touched Rinetta on the shoulder.

Now I have known Rinetta ride a day's camel journey into an African desert for no worthier purpose than revelling in a sunset. Aching and protesting, I have toiled in her company to the tops of snow-clad

mountains the better to enjoy an uninterrupted orgy of colour and light. And now, with this fiery glow suffusing the world under our noses, I touched her, as I say, on the shoulder.

"Rinetta," I said. "Look at the sunset."

She made no movement or sign that she heard. I bent over her. "It's the most amazing sunset you ever saw."

Her lips moved; feeble words came no louder than a breath. I bent lower and inclined my ear.

"*Drat* the sunset!"

Anyhow, for the sake of her infant daughter, I like to think the word was "*drat*."

It was the eve of Cowes week and the *Speedwell* appeared to attract considerable interest as we skirted the Esplanade and dropped anchor. A couple of pairs of grey flannel trousers flapped at the shrouds; a shirt and two sweaters fought a windy battle with the jib. George's concession to "*Les convenances*" was a suit of dungaree overalls we found in a locker; mine a blue bathing costume supplemented for warmth's sake by a claret-coloured jumper of Clarissa's. Rinetta, indifferent for once to public opinion in the matter of dress, bade me take her to an hotel at once.

It was a good many years since I had landed at Cowes, but then it was to eat strawberries and cream on the club lawn of the Royal Yacht Squadron. No less. Some echo of that splendid moment whispered that if I set foot ashore in Cowes again I must at least wear trousers. And mine, flapping in the breeze, were most damnably moist and clammy. . . .

"Clarissa," I said. "You at least—that's to say——"

"Yes," said Clarissa quickly. "I'll take her."

I ferried them ashore and returned to find George frying bacon. We supped in silence while the *Speedwell* rioted amid the waves, snatching at her cable, and the lights of Cowes winked across the roads.

Clarissa returned finally with the announcement that Rinetta was in bed. A real bed in a real hotel; she had been dosed with brandy and water. Somehow I hadn't thought of that. I began to climb into my trousers.

"George," I said, "I hate to leave you and Clarissa, but as you know I have to be careful of my health. If I had only myself to consider I should regard the *Speedwell* as my place of duty and stop there regardless of the risk to my weak chest. As a married man with dependants, however——" I hauled the skiff alongside.

George climbed in beside me, cast off and rowed in silence. As I disembarked he handed me an empty soda-water bottle.

"Bring me off a drop when you come," he whispered.

3

All the world was drenched in sunlight when I walked down to the beach the following morning. There were no signs of life on board the *Speedwell*, but my hails finally produced a sleepy-eyed apparition I recognized as George. He manned the dinghy and manœuvred it amid bathers to where I stood.

"How's Rinetta?"

"She thinks she ought to get back to her baby. She thinks it has probably cut several teeth and learned to talk since she's been away. She doubts if it would recognize her. There's a steamer from Ryde at eleven——"

George groaned. "Wait!" he said darkly.

Clarissa greeted us over the gunwale of the *Speedwell* and inquired after the invalid. I repeated what I had told George. Her eyes softened.

"There! George, d'you hear?"

Another groan was the only answer. Clarissa was packing a tooth-brush and comb into a sponge-bag. I noticed she wore her shore-going shoes.

"I've had the most awful dream," she explained. "I dreamed baby was ill and calling me."

"But that's absurd! It can't talk, can it?"

Clarissa looked at me pityingly.

"No use," interrupted George. "I told her it was the jaws of the gaff squeaking against the mast. There's a boat from Ryde at eleven, Clarissa." His tone was that of a man who had battled long against the inevitable. "You'd better have breakfast with Rinetta at the hotel. *We're* dam-well going to Beaulieu."

We put Clarissa ashore and were shoving off again when she suddenly turned and ran to the water's edge. "Oh, there's something I've forgotten!"

"Well?" asked George gruffly. We lay on our oars.

"I invented a riddle just now when I saw him"—she indicated me—"coming off." There was within us a need for breakfast rather than dallying with the

abstruse, but women were ever otherwise. "Go on," commanded her lord.

"Why was Cowes cowed?"

We both shook our heads testily.

"I can't think of an answer, either," said Clarissa.

"But I think the first part's rather good, don't you? It sort of came to me——"

"Give way!" gasped George over his shoulder, and we bent to the oars. Clarissa turned and walked rapidly towards the hotel.

We went to Beaulieu, the *Speedwell*, George and I, even into the depths of the New Forest. It was a perfect day, a gentle breeze bringing with it the myriad cool scents of woodland. The Primus was on its best Sunday behaviour, the *Speedwell* sailed like a witch. George sat and smoked while I took the tiller; then I smoked while George sailed. We ate innumerable meals.

"Rum things, women," observed George as the afternoon wore on. It was the first remark we had exchanged for upwards of an hour. I nodded.

"The deuce of a nuisance in a boat," he continued, his eyes on a field of ripening corn. "And all that. But somehow or another . . ." He knocked out his pipe and blew through it, leaving the sentence unfinished.

I examined my watch, the sky and the slow-moving current with elaborate deliberation.

"What about poking off back?" I suggested. "Wind may drop. We've a good way to go."

George examined the sky, the river, and finally his watch. "It's awfully jolly up here, but I suppose we might as well think about making a move. . . ."

Won't Clarissa be sick when she hears we got here ! ”

Clarissa greeted the intelligence with unconcern, as a matter of fact. We glided to our moorings on the flood tide as the dusk was falling and lights were beginning to wink on the craft up harbour. We tucked the *Speedwell* up for the night and pulled ashore; as the bows of the dinghy grated on the shingle two white-clad figures rose off the shank of an old anchor and came towards us.

“Is it well with the child?” I asked, and two voices replied in soft unison that it was well.

“Now, Clarissa,” I said, “now that anxiety has ceased to haunt us all, answer me one question: Why was Cowes cowed?”

“Yes,” echoed George. “Why?”

Clarissa laughed softly. “Oh,” she said, and linked her arm in her husband's. “Don't you know, you old silly? Well, I'll tell you when we get home. Hurry, hurry, hurry!”

I never heard the answer, but I suspect it was a mere ruse to get George back.

V THE LIGHTS

I

"Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness. . . ."

LONGFELLOW.

NIGHT came up over the edge of the sea and the retreating daylight turned to make its last stand about the distant hill-tops ashore.

The Fleet at anchor in the bay melted into indeterminate shadows pricked with lights. Even the shadows were swallowed in the darkness at length; only the lights remained. They seemed to be decked about the harbour—here a cluster, there strung wide apart, scattering their reflections like spilt gems on the wind-ruffled surface.

The sense of the mysterious that hovers night and day above ships descended upon that noiseless glitter. Somewhere out of sight in the electric-lit spaces betrayed by the scuttles' gleam, thousands of laborious lives were working out their destinies. Yet save for a thin far-off hail to a passing boat, remote bells striking the hour, or a pipe so faint and fairy-like that it might have been Pan himself breathing into a reed, no sound of life reached the land.

Towards that orderly confusion of glowing pin-points other lights were moving from the direction of the pier. They were the picket-boats of the Fleet

returning on the Officers' dinner trip with tired golfers, stewards, postmen, wet and muddy shooting parties. The lights travelled with unswerving directness, spreading fanwise from the starting point as each boat picked out its own ship in the far-off scintillation and steadied its course on her.

It was slack water and the ships were swung in all directions. The hurrying bow-lights of the motor-boats changed from red to green as the helms went over. Their speed slackened—stopped alongside each brilliantly-lit accommodation ladder, crept ahead to the lower boom and rested there.

Far above the intermittent line of lights that was the Flagship's upper-deck, a star of great magnitude appeared in the dark sky and flickered rapidly. Other stars of corresponding brilliance sprang into being above the watchful ships and hung poised, attentive.

The light above the flagship continued its swift, irregular twinkling. At intervals it paused, and the remainder all blinked together, as a man nods, intent on the conversation of a superior. For the Flagship was talking. Steam for so many knots at such and such a time, followed by details of Fleet numbers and rendezvous; but before the message was half finished another light on the Flagship's bridge began to wink; it was answered by lights in corresponding positions along the lines, and the story went forth under the dark heavens that the Admiral's pet spaniel had been lost ashore that afternoon whilst entrusted to the care of the Flag Lieutenant, who, not incredibly, was anxious for clues to its whereabouts. The lights blinked sympathetically, and were obliterated. A fresh light appeared and began a soundless mono-

logue. It was a signal exercise conducted for the benefit of signal boys. Three different messages were flickering simultaneously from the Flagship's bridge. At the far end of the line a stuttering speck of light inquired politely if the Gunnery Lieutenant of a ship at the other end would return a borrowed note-book on Hydraulics. The ship addressed replied soothingly and went on to inform the Flagship that Second-Class Stoker Benjamin Jones had developed measles, and what were they to do about it? Another sought permission to exercise a searchlight, the director-gear of which was in need of adjustment.

Light answered light, flicker called to flicker out of the darkness enshrouding a Fleet invisible. The fingers of insignificant individuals clicked out the messages; insignificant individuals read, logged, and transferred their purport to others to act on. Hour succeeded hour; the human entities on the shadowy bridges were relieved by others and sought oblivion in bunk or hammock. Still the lights flickered through the night. It was as if in the clear darkness of the starry ether a single directing intelligence worked on, purposeful, untiring. . . .

2

The Admiral sat at the polished oval table listening absently to the Flag Captain's story of a bag of snipe. The Flag Commander, whose mind was chiefly occupied with a chilblain on his left heel, maintained a semblance of credulous interest in the narrative. The Secretary eyed the Flag Lieutenant with a remote gleam of malicious amusement behind his pince-nez,

while he tried to crack two walnuts by squeezing them together in his hands. The Flag Lieutenant busied himself with a sheaf of signals which the Signal Boatswain, cap and telescope in hand, had been supplementing at intervals throughout dinner.

"But what was poor little Clumps doing when you saw her last?" demanded the Admiral, interrupting the Flag Captain's tale of prowess.

The Flag Lieutenant, who was beginning to detest Clumps, shuffled slips of paper and cleared his throat nervously. "Signal just come, sir——"

"Eh?" The Admiral turned to the speaker. "Have they found her?"

"No, sir. It's a case of measles—Second-Class Stoker Benjamin——"

"What was she doing when *you* saw her last, Flags?"

"Chasing a moor-hen, sir. Benjamin Jones is his name. And there's another signal to ask if twenty-eight youths can be accommodated for training——"

"H'm! How far did she chase the moor-hen? I don't believe it. She never chased a moor-hen in her life. Have they made the steaming signal yet?"

"Making it now, sir, I fancy." The Flag Lieutenant leaned forward and gazed through a scuttle at the twitching lamp of a repeating ship. "Yes, sir, making it now."

"We shall have to leave her behind—in a trap or something," said the Admiral gloomily.

His staff made vague sympathetic noises intended to convey reassurance. The Secretary, by virtue of fifteen years' service with his chief, permitted himself mild levity.

"We've sent a warrant for the leave-breaker's arrest to the police, sir."

"Police!" ejaculated the Admiral. "What's the good of telling the police when she's in a trap? An otter trap. Drowned by now."

Conversation languished. The Flag Commander eyed the port decanter wistfully and wondered if the Admiral would send it on a second round.

The Flag Lieutenant, seizing the entry of the Signal Boatswain, who handed him a signal and spoke in an undertone, as a pretext to escape to a less rarefied atmosphere, murmured an excuse and departed. The remainder sat on in chilly silence till the Admiral rose and retired to his after-cabin.

The Flag Lieutenant banged into his cabin, lit a pipe, took off his aiguillettes, hurled them into a corner, and said: "Trap be sugared!" twice, with passionate emphasis.

There was a knock at the door, and a junior midshipman drew back the curtain.

"Please, sir, Leason told me to remind you it's his birthday, and will you come along to the Gun-room for a sing-song?"

"Yes," said the Flag Lieutenant "I'll come along to anything—as long as no one talks about spaniel bitches."

On the way he passed the Gunnery Lieutenant's cabin, and seeing the occupant within, intruded his head.

"Guns, there's hell to pay in the cuddy."

The Gunnery Lieutenant was busy turning over the contents of two book-shelves, which lay in a heap on his bunk. He groaned.

"Does he know you peppered her?"

"Not yet. I expect she's still running."

"We all have our troubles. I borrowed a notebook of Lascelles' from Sammy Dodd, an' Sammy wants it back before we sail, an' I can't find the darn thing for sour apples." He stirred the heap of literature disconsolately.

"It's the Sub's birthday," said the Flag Lieutenant. "I'm going to get tight in the Gunroom."

"Good idea," said the Gunnery Lieutenant. "That's more or less how I feel. I'd come too if I could find this darned book."

"Tell Sammy you're sending it over."

"But I can't find the perishin' thing."

"Never mind. Send him something else."

"But what'll I send him? Those were the last staff course notes at Whaley——"

"Doesn't matter." The Flag Lieutenant explored the jumbled library on the bunk. "'Inman's Tables,' 'Jock of the Bushveld,' 'Practical Taxidermy,' 'Pen-rod'—that's a good yarn, but it 'ud take more than that to make old Sammy smile—'Gunroom Ditty-Box,' 'Conic Sections,' 'Lamb's Essays.' My word, you've got a catholic taste in literature. 'Pendlebury's Arithmetic.' Send him 'Pendlebury's Arithmetic.' No, here's a better one: 'English Landscape Painters.' Old Sammy'd love that."

"He'll chuck it through the scuttle when he gets it."

"No, he won't. Keep him quiet for a week. Here, wrap it up. I'll send him a signal." He scribbled rapidly on a pad he had picked up off the table. "Their Sub's dining over here with ours. He can

take the book back in a nice brown paper parcel." He dashed off his initials on the pad. "There! how'll this do: 'Gunnery Lieutenant to Ditto. Am sending book over to-night.'" He rang the bell and handed the chit to a messenger. "Now come along to the Gunroom. I can hear they've got 'Coal-black Mammy' on the gramophone."

The Leading Signalman turned with his hand on the lever key of the flashing lamp. For fifteen seconds the metal slats of the shutter had been clattering jerkily, and suddenly, a mile away, a light answered the violet beam that shot out in irregular jets from under his hand.

"Go on," he commanded an invisible subordinate. "She's answered."

"Gunnery Lootenant to Ditto," a carefully pitched voice began out of the darkness that enveloped the bridge. "Am sending book——."

The metallic clatter drowned his words; splashes of light jerked out into the night: "*Sending*, go on—*book* . . . what's next?" Overhead another lamp commenced to click. The swift succession of flickers illuminated the signal platform with ghostly gleams.

The forms of men appeared, vanished, reappeared and were obliterated by the darkness: some were betrayed moving about the narrow confines of the signal bridge, others stood tense and immobile behind the eye-pieces of their binoculars, or bent scribbling on signal pads at the readers' elbows.

Here and there a face would spring into relief out of each brief period of nigrescence, staring with narrowed eyes along hurried beams of the lamp; a

face which by reason of its wrapt intensity of concentrating might be that of a statued god carved into eternal contemplation of the infinite. The murmur of carefully modulated voices alternated with the clash and rattle of shutters flashing simultaneously to different quarters of the night, commands, acknowledgments and interrogation. All round them through the long hours the lights of the Fleet blinked responsive.

* * * *

Above each scoured mess-table along the stokers' mess-deck hung a row of hammocks. They resembled mammoth grey sausages suspended by their lanyards from hooks in the transverse frames overhead. Here and there a scrubby chin jutting above the edge of the bulging canvas trough, or a sinewy tattooed arm outflung along the blanket, betrayed a sleeping tenant. But a number of men still lingered seated round the tables. The gruff murmur of voices was punctuated by a sudden burst of laughter or a few lines of a song. The whir of a sewing-machine all but drowned the ceaseless drone of the fans driving the air through the ventilating shafts and trunks. A smell of food and paint, of much-slept-in bedding, and the spicy whiff of tea and sugar from an adjoining issue room, dispelled the illusion of freshness caused by the humming fans.

A young stoker who had been writing a letter, using the lid of his ditty-box as a desk, carefully corked his penny bottle of ink, wiped his nib on the sleeve of his jumper, and replaced the writing

materials in the little box. His face wore an expression of tense preoccupation. It mattered nothing to him that his neighbour on the bench sang discordantly a Salvation Army hymn to the accompaniment of a mouth-organ two messes away, or that in the hammock overhead a tired man snored stertorously; he was indifferent to the fact that the table shook to the vibration of the sewing-machine, manipulated by a muscular Leading Stoker bent on putting a patch in the seat of a pair of duck trousers before "Pipe down," while a messmate sought to lighten his toil with the involved details of a homeric fight waged single-handed against three policemen and the inmates of an antipodean bawdy-house. He cared for none of these things; was, in fact, unconscious of them. In two days' time a little general servant, in the house of a prosperous ironmonger in Gillingham, would receive a letter; and the same alchemy of love would transform her drab surroundings—basement kitchen and its blackbeetles, greasy scullery and damp, stale odours—into a garden full of sunshine and the song of birds.

The young stoker stowed away his ditty-box in a rack overhead, put the key very carefully in a leather fob in his belt, and turned towards the outboard hammock. With practised fingers he swiftly cast off the lashing, coiled it up and stowed it in the clews at the foot. He wriggled out of his jumper and jersey, buckled the belt round the waist of his flannel, and sat down to kick off his boots. At his elbow a red giant of a man, hairy as a gorilla, stood naked but for a cholera belt, scratching himself and anointing sores with some quack ointment. He jested

about his sores. Overhead the sleeper snored steadily, and the fans droned like a swarm of bees. The far-off cadence of a pipe rose and fell, rose to a single high note, twittered and ceased abruptly. The sewing-machine stopped. The Chief Stoker of the mess-deck, a chubby man with white hair and irascible eyes, moved between the rows of hammocks.

"Pipe down! Turn in, lads. Don't forget the middle watch!"

On all sides men were already turning in: divesting themselves of their outer garments, but clinging for the most part to pants, socks, and flannel. Grunts, yawns, sighs, grumbled oaths, rattle of lashings against the canvas bellies of the hammocks, creak of lanyards and clews as they took their burdens, gradually gave place to the steady hum of the fans.

The owner of the outboard hammock tucked his boots into the clews where his lashing was coiled, folded jumper, jersey, and trousers, and stowed them away under his little horse-hair pillow. Then, with a hand uplifted to the frame overhead, he swung himself up into the hammock. Sighing deeply he adjusted the blanket about himself, and, fumbling under the mattress, drew forth a frayed and thumb-marked book. A light on the bulkhead shone full on his face, and illumined the close print. Later on he would sleep, with the glare of the light beating on his closed eyelids. But for the ensuing two hours he read painfully and laboriously. It was a book he had selected out of the mass of literature in the ship's library with some vague idea of "improving himself."

The name of the author was unknown to him; the master hand that had written the words which enchanted him with their music and half-comprehended message had long passed into dust. But for the sake of their magic he had watched that swinging billet next the lamp as a prisoner watches the door of his cell, and now at last it was his. Its lawful occupant, measles-stricken, had passed into durance vile behind a carbolic-saturated sheet in the sick bay. And he, comfortably between the blankets of Benjamin Jones's place, read blinking far into the night.

The dark night was split by the single ray of a searchlight. It shivered about the surface of the low-lying clouds, hesitated nervously, and swooped down to the water. It travelled jerkily to the distant shore and moved slowly, brushing the margin of the tide with a tremulous finger-tip.

A bedraggled spaniel that had been whimpering about the shingle and seaweed at the water's edge raised her head and howled.

Where the searchlight beam narrowed to a point a little group of figures were bending over a piece of mechanism on the searchlight platform of the inshore ship of the line.

A hail from the bridge below interrupted their highly technical conversation.

"Steady the light, Sir." A Yeoman of Signals, telescope in hand, climbed the metal ladder. "I see a dawg ashore, there, Sir. Maybe it's the Commander-in-Chief's. Flagship was singin' out in the second dog-watch they'd lost the Admiral's spaniel." He stared through the glass. "Up a bit, Sir. She

don't like the light. She's running in-shore. I couldn't say if it was a spaniel, not being one for dawgs myself. Canaries is my 'obby ashore."

The Torpedo Lieutenant took the glass from the speaker.

"That's a spaniel all right—more to the left—there! Steady now. Up a little. Yes, that's the blighter. There's a man and a woman sitting on a bench. . . . They're walking away now and the dog's following them. . . . Keep the light on them! Keep the light on them! Yeoman, send a hand down to tell the Captain."

The Torpedo Lieutenant turned to his Gunner beside him. "My word, Mr. Clatsworthy! What a bit of luck we chose this moment to adjust our director-gear. Shan't we be the Blue-eyed Boys with the Flag. We'll send a boat in . . ."

In the shelter of the sea-wall stood an old wooden bench. For a generation it had been the trysting-place of lovers. Shrouded by the discreet darkness within sound of the murmur of the sea, it has been a little Eden—in all, or nearly all, the phases of that eternal story. To-night the unwinking searchlight found it, and in the pitiless glare Eve sprang affrighted to her feet.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "That dog startled me—nosin' about my ankles! An' that limelight fair blinded me! Whose dog is it?"

"A lost one," said Adam at her side, blinking like an owl in the glare. "Why don't they put that light out?"

"Come away," said Eve, "I feel like as if someone was staring."

Hand in hand they made their way along the shingle, the dog snuffing disconsolately at their heels. Like a Flaming Sword the light wheeled slowly, following them.

Adam looked back defiantly over his shoulder.

"I suppose they think they're bein' funny," he grumbled.

"Sauce, I call it," said Eve.

An old man sat on the same bench the following evening, resting his arms on his stick and staring out across the bay, empty in the fading light. On the shore in front of him the outgoing tide left little leaden-hued puddles and whorls of soapy sea-foam along the curve of its retreat. A gull circled inquisitively above a small object left by the ebb on the sand. The old man watched the bird for a while, and then with the deliberate movements of the aged, unbuttoned his overcoat, drew out a watch, examined it, put it back in his pocket, and rebuttoned his coat. It was supper-time.

He rose and walked with slow steps across the wet sand. The small oblong object stranded by the sea caught his eye. He prodded at it with his stick, stooped laboriously, and picked it up. It was a book, sodden with water; the colour in the cover had stained the sand where it had lain, but the title was still decipherable: "English Landscape Painters."

VI

THE A.F.O.'s

ANYBODY can buy them.

The Admiralty Fleet Orders have swelled since 1910, when the printed series first started, to a bulky volume containing all that are permanent in upwards of thirty thousand general orders issued to the Fleet and Naval Shore Establishments.

Think of it: eleven years of mandate, behest, rebuke, and precept by which a Navy has ruled its paths! It is like trying to contemplate Infinity: yet any Captain's Clerk is expected to have the gamut at his finger-tips.

The book is a sort of gospel of the Doctrine of Responsibility. The first Order is headed "Responsibility for Moving H.M. Ships through Locks and Basins"; the last, eleven hundred and some odd pages farther on, "Responsibility for Water Level." This refers to boilers, and provides for the complete undoing of the luckless Leading Stoker who allows a boiler to run dry. Skimming through the pages is like contemplating from an aeroplane the reefs and sand-banks, the buoys and leading-marks about an intricate fairway. And over all is raised, as it were, a gigantic forefinger wagging in shadowy admonishment: "It has been brought to the notice of their Lordships . . ."

One would hardly expect to find much in these

laconic phrases of officialdom that is of human interest. Yet they deal with the Personnel, *Matériel*, and Administration of the British Navy. It needs but a trick of memory, a twist of the imagination here and there, to convert this arid volume into a picture-book whose pages evoke memories of things and scenes that were never brought to the notice of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.

It is curious that the first echo of the war appears under the following staccato heading: "Wounded Officers—Particulars—Report." One would expect something more startling to have been left stranded where the first wave of war broke among the Admiralty Printed Orders. Yet at the time it was, if not uppermost in our minds, certainly very prominent, this business of getting wounded. Our medical staff were zealous fellows, and the P.M.O. had been reading the "Handbook on the Russo-Japanese War." He ordained baths and clean underwear immediately before going into action. As, during the first three weeks of the war, action scares in our particular squadron occurred every few hours, this finally called forth serious protests. Heaven knows we were anxious enough to enter into the letter and the spirit of the game we had been trained for all our lives. But when after about three days every clean article of raiment had been exhausted, and the prospect of again finding ourselves in the vicinity of a laundry appeared to be one of the post-war problems, this whim of the P.M.O.'s could no longer be humoured. At his earnest entreaty, however, we dangled from our persons picric-acid pads, rolls of lint bandages, hypodermic syringes of

morphia (their use, he grimly explained, was not primarily to deaden pain as much as to ensure that our shrieks of agony might not unman our fellows), and, lastly, a pair of "Pusser's" scissors. We were proud of our scissors. They were the only lethal weapon I ever carried in the Great War for Civilization, and they were intended (again I quote our Medical Adviser) to slit up our trousers and expose the jagged fractured femur that might be protruding somewhere. . . .

That phase passed. Wardrooms subscribed to *La Vie Parisienne*, and Naval Surgeons found other things to read than the "Handbook on the Russo-Japanese War."

It is towards the end of the 1914 Orders that the first mention appears of the Motor Boat Reserve. The standardized motor-launches which subsequently became familiar features of the coastwise navigation and the harbours and estuaries of the kingdom during the war, had not then appeared on the scene. The Motor Boat Reserve was an unhomogeneous collection of motor craft owned and manned for the most part by amateurs and volunteers. Their war equipment was confined to a rifle and a pair of hand-flags. The first I saw was a Dutch-built craft, owned, I think, by Mr. Arnold Bennett. She had just returned from three days' patrol somewhere outside the Swin, and her Captain was stepping ashore to make some purchases before turning in for his well-earned rest. Perhaps it is because he was the first R.N.V.R. motor-boat skipper I ever met that I look back on him as representative of all that helped to build the high traditions of this force.

No detail of that mental photograph is lacking : the grey sea fog drifting in from the Thames estuary, the hulls of yachts on the slips ; mud and weed and oyster-shells underfoot, and a tired elderly man, rather bowed about the shoulders, in oilskins, sea-boots, and sou'wester, crunching across the gravel to the roadway. He walked with the slow crabbed action of the deep-sea sailor ; his face was the colour of an old brick wall—the very tint of the walls about him—broken up by innumerable deep wrinkles, with the salt of the sea-spray whitening in the puckers round his weary eyes. His eyes were very blue, and candid like a child's, but there were memories in them older than the span of many children's lives. Only when he smiled were these memories released ; but he smiled not very often, and then rather slowly and reluctantly, as if it hurt the wrinkles to bring them into play too quickly.

God knows how many years he had voluntarily endured the sea for the devout love he bore it. He was well known among the South Sea Islands and in those mysterious backwaters where the Frisian Islands make a lee. If you searched the seven seas for him in vain it was perhaps because his boat was being locked through a Belgian canal while he smoked a pipe with the owner of an adjoining barge. The discerning hall porter of an exclusive club in Piccadilly appeared to bow to him in special reverence on one of the rare occasions he passed its portals. He was living at the time in a seaman's lodging-house near the London docks, where, as he explained, with his tranquil eyes upon the sunlit traffic streaming past the Green Park, he met old friends, and I suspect,

although he did not say so, more lame dogs to help over stiles than he found in Mayfair.

"Things?" he echoed, when once I ask him where on earth in his nomad sea-gipsy life he kept his things. "Things! A man doesn't want any *things*! I don't possess anything more than I can carry in my pockets."

He has sailed since then, in the late summer of his life, into its haven. Two things he does own now that he cannot carry in his pockets, and if he is no longer allowed to keep them as full as of yore, I fancy his heart is fuller.

"Dental Treatment" is a heading that recalls a scene enacted at a certain Naval Barracks during mobilization. It was grim enough in its way, but not without humour. I had screwed up my courage to the point which carries a man to the portal of the torture-chamber and there I hovered, debating whether after all I wasn't rather too busy to waste time on purely personal affairs, when the white-clad Surgeon and his acolyte saw me.

"Come in, come in!" he cried heartily. "D'you mind sitting down a second and waiting? I've got one more recruit to attend to, and then I'll fix you." I accepted the respite gratefully, and as I sank into the American-cloth upholstered sofa in the corner, a Regulating Petty Officer appeared in the doorway, propelling a terrified six-foot New Entry Stoker into the room. A steer shot into the reek of a slaughter-house could not have rolled its eyes in more frenzied alarm than this raw recruit. Heaven and the over-worked New Entry Office alone knew what startling

experiences he had undergone in the past few hours. His hair had certainly been cut; as likely as not he had been compelled to have a bath. And now they were going to pull out his teeth!

He looked wildly round at the array of unfamiliar implements, the acolyte with the gas-mask, the relentless visage of the Regulating Petty Officer.

"Ah feel baäd!" he quavered.

"No you don't," retorted the Surgeon briskly, fingering his stethoscope. "Unbutton your trousers."

The last remnant of the lad's nerve broke. He gazed at the strange implement and shook his head with passionate protest.

"Na, na!" he baa-ed, for all the world like a lamb under the knife; "na, na!"

Whoever in bygone ages designed the blue-jacket's jumper and flannel did not probably carry his imagination beyond the necessity for protection against wintry winds. Stethoscopes were not catered for—in fact, not invented. The Surgeon merely sought access to the patient's heart as a preliminary to administering an anæsthetic, the peculiarity of the sailor's costume (which is constructed on the button-up-abaft-all principle) not admitting of any other avenue of approach.

But they were busy men: the mobilization of the Navy for war left little time for explanations calculated to soothe ruffled susceptibilities. I remember watching the deft fingers of the Regulating Petty Officer, and thinking what a good pickpocket he would have made. The Surgeon had his stethoscope

to his ear before the gasping victim realized what had happened.

"Eh, but ah feel baäd!" he bleated, as they jerked his garments back to their normal aspect.

"Nonsense!" reiterated the Surgeon, and nodded towards the chair. They did not dally over the invitation. The Petty Officer hoisted him into the chair, the acolyte clapped the nosebag over his face, and the victim, convinced at last that his hour had come, began a desperate fight for life.

They were three to one, and the gas told at length, but it was a stupendous conflict. The convulsed limbs had scarcely sunk into inanition when something whizzed past my head, struck the wall, and fell on the floor. Another followed it, another and another. The Surgeon was jerking stumps over his shoulder with the rapid movements of a farmer's wife plucking a fowl. Five I counted, when he paused and took a deep breath.

The victim sat up, spat into the proffered bowl, and rose giddily to his feet.

"There!" said the Regulating Petty Officer, with the benevolent air of one who had taken out a child for an afternoon's amusement. "That never 'urt you, did it? I telled you no one was goin' to 'urt you!"

The giant swayed and grinned bloodily at us all in turn.

"Eh!" he said appreciatively, "eh, but ah feel droonk! 'As us bin fighting, laäds?"

Things dental appear to have "been brought to the notice of their Lordships" rather prominently. I

apologize for dwelling on the ban beneath which most of the sons of men walk the earth from the cradle to the grave, but a few pages farther on occurs the magnanimous headline, "Dentures—Supply Free." "Dentures" is, I suspect, dentalese for false teeth. Before the days of this order a sailor in need of such embellishment paid for his own. One exception there was, however. He was a flute soloist in a certain flagship on foreign service. Somewhat given to strong drink when ashore, he chanced one contentious night to receive a blow which deprived him of the teeth planted by nature in the front of his mouth. The incident would have passed unnoticed by the Powers that Were had it not affected his performance on the flute.

The Admiral, twirling the stem of his wine-glass in post-prandial humour one evening, knitted his brows as the soloist attempted the physically impossible. He studied the band programme. "Damme," quoth he, "is the fellow drunk?"

The Flag Captain, no musician himself, attempted to explain the nature of the calamity that had overtaken the flutist.

"Tell him," said the dweller upon Olympus, "to go and get measured for a false set and I'll foot the bill."

The musician, conducted by the Bandmaster, complied with the mandate, and in due course was furnished with an entirely new outfit. His smile was one of the things pointed out to visitors. He never relinquished it: like a musical comedy actress posing for a dentifrice advertisement. His performances on the flute were reported by the Admiral's Coxswain

to cause tears of pure emotion to stream down the distinguished Flag Officer's face.

But the old Adam asserted itself. The solo-flutist went ashore in all the glory of his facial embellishment, and looked upon the cup when it may be said to have been a lurid crimson. An American gunboat in the port happened to have given leave to the watch the same evening, and the musician returned on board his ship with a spectacular black eye, but minus, alas! his presentation teeth.

This time the wardroom stepped, metaphorically, into the breach. The flutist's warbling was reported to aid the Admiral's digestion: at all costs the Admiral's digestion must be preserved. By mess subscription a fresh set was procured and harmony restored. But the wardroom took no chances. By order of the Commander the Bandmaster took the "denture" on charge in his account. They were kept in the music store and served out to their wearer together with his flute, music-stand, and score, "as requisite." And when finally he was invalided home from dyspepsia, they were nailed up for luck, horse-shoe-wise, over the store-room door.

Grim as these references to dental matters may be, there is an even sterner note in the heading: "Discharge from H.M. Service—Applications for"!

The ensuing order goes on to define the procedure to be adopted when, all measures of correction having been exhausted, a King's Hard Bargain is finally dispensed with. The application, duly setting forth in detail the character of the incorrigible, is submitted to the Commander-in-Chief, and in due course

receives his approval. A certain Post Captain, having decided to rid the Navy of a miscreant member of his ship's company, sent for his clerk and bade him prepare the necessary application for submission to the Commander-in-Chief. The clerk, a timid fledgling, intensely conscientious and in considerable awe of his Captain, was in some doubt how he should word the application so as to condense in as few words as possible a career of profligacy and insubordination extending over a considerable number of years. The Captain, a man of few words, replied with a grunt of disgust: "Say he's a son of a gun"—anyhow, let "gun" suffice—and forgot the incident.

The clerk returned half an hour later to the Captain's cabin with a basket of papers for signature. The Captain was entertaining two brother Captains, and dashed off half a dozen signatures whilst he listened to a recital by one of his visitors of the merits of a newly acquired polo pony. The clerk hastily blotted the signatures and bore the papers away.

That afternoon the Captain received a letter from the Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief:

"DEAR — [it ran],—The Commander-in-Chief desires me to return the enclosed application for discharge with the request that you will reconsider the wording of your covering letter. The Admiral is disposed to agree, after careful consideration of the man's service certificate, that your description of him is adequate. In view of the official nature of the document, however, he begs that you will adhere to phraseology of custom and convention.—Yours, etc."

The dumbfounded recipient unfolded the document in question and read :

"SIR,—I have the honour to submit the enclosed application for the discharge 'Services no longer required' of Able Seaman —, Official Number —, on the grounds that this man is a son of a gun.—I have the honour to be, Sir, Your obedient servant —"

The Captain groaned and rang the bell for the sentry.

"Tell Mr. — I wish to speak to him," he said.

The incident had a profound effect on the clerk. After pondering long and deeply upon the enigma of life he forsook the career of a Naval officer and became a clergyman.

Such, to borrow a biological phrase, was his "answer back." More comprehensible, perhaps, is that of another officer whose relations with his Captain were also strained. It is recalled by the heading : "Surveying Recorders."

There are, in a certain remote corner of the globe, four peaks. They are visible from the harbour, and afforded admirable beacons for triangulation to the man-of-war sent to carry out a survey of the adjacent coast-line, but up to date of the visit in question they had remained nameless.

It must be regretfully recorded that the Navigating Officer, who was charged with the task of surveying this locality and christening the peaks, cherished a profound dislike (whether with or without grounds I am ignorant) for his Captain, who reciprocated.

cated it. The former spent some weeks away from his ship with a surveying party—doubtless to the mutual relief of both parties—and finally returned with the fruits of his labours in the shape of a chart embellished with soundings and the four peaks flaunting the following singular appellations :

“Yam,” “Yrac,” “Eb” and “Denmad.”

The Captain criticized this flight of fancy with a hostile but unsuspicious eye.

“Funny names you’ve chosen for those peaks,” was his only comment.

“Yes, sir,” replied the sun-blistered Navigator. “I got the idea when I was reading the Psalms.”

“Umph !” was the reply. “I thought they had an Eastern sound about them.”

Now the Captain’s name was Cary—or Yrac, according to how you read it.

Unexpected prohibitions and inconceivable cautions follow each other in swift sequence from page to page. A cow, finding a pot of paint exposed in a Royal Naval Air Station, consumed it with apparent relish, and, in the words of the resultant order, having been “rendered seriously ill,” Commanding Officers are warned for all time to ensure that paint shall be inaccessible to cattle.

The reader sighs for the pencil of a Heath Robinson, and passes on to Coal in Transports and thence to Parsons Turbines. There is a weird fascination in the irrelevance of the headings. From permission to wear national emblems on Patron Saints’ days the mind is invited to leap to Economy in Use of Canvas, and from this consideration to the

necessity for immediately reporting the fact of a bower cable having been carried away.¹ A hoary legend among sailors tells of a ship which made such a report by wireless to the flagship: the message was intercepted by Whitehall, and in due course chanced to receive the attention of a Civilian Admiralty Official. "Report immediately," commanded this pundit, "who has carried it away, and what he has done with it."

The question of appropriate badges and mottoes for men-of-war resulted in an order that all Commanding Officers should submit to the Admiralty drawings of the badges in vogue in each ship. A large number, it transpired, owed their origin to the ingenuity of the officers in question—in some cases to that of their female relatives. A few were of the type unlikely to find favour with the College of Heralds, and in this category may be included the badge of H.M.S. *Tormentor*, whose boats and notepaper flaunted the device of a flea. "And not even an Heraldic flea," appears plaintively in the official minutes on the subject.

There is humour in plenty between the lines of these pages. And there is here and there reference to a once-accepted order of things already fallen, so mutable are all human affairs, and so swift the changes of naval progress—into the dust and shadow of the past. An order relating to the sennit-hat, that picturesque and cumbersome article of a sailor's equipment once inseparable from naval pageantry, serves as a reminder that the sennit-hat is now no more. The vastly more useful sun-helmet has sup-

¹ *i.e.* parted.

planted it, and future generations of little boys in sailor suits, as the elastic is snapped beneath their chins, will ask their nurses in vain the origin of their strange headgear.

And the "Wrens"—who at one time appear to have provided more "copy" to the author of the A. F. O.'s than any other branch of the Naval Service—the Wrens have passed. "W.R.N.S.—Demobilization of," sounds their knell in the bound volume of the Fleet Orders. It must have awakened not a few regretful pangs in the susceptible hearts of the masculine Navy, which had good cause to be proud of its Little Sisters, with their whimsical motto, "Never at Sea." It is strange that the Washington Conference has ignored the memory of them, for they remain the British Navy's chief incentive to another war.

VII

CHOPS AND CHIPS

BUD, 'Orace and the Miserable Starkey, football-garbed and muddy, sat on the high fender in the officers' entrance hall of the Naval Barracks drinking "long shandies."

Bud was called Bud because he was Lieutenant Ivor Sedgewick Hepworth Barnes, Royal Navy, Distinguished Service Cross, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour; 'Orace owed his soubriquet to the fact that he happened to have been christened Edward. The Miserable Starkey knew no other appellation since at some juvenile junketing in the distant past it was apparent to the meanest intelligence that little children liked him.

Bud removed his face from the interior of his tumbler, sighed deeply, and contemplated his gory knees.

"I have endured a summer in this penitentiary," he said ruefully, "waiting for the rugger season to come; and now the ground's as hard as a brick and no more fit for rugger than the asphalt parade-ground is."

The other two had spent the majority of their leisure for the past rainless six months trying to convince Bud that the Admiralty, in giving him a shore appointment after nearly seven years' exceedingly active service afloat, had meant kindly. They sat

now one on either side of the malcontent eyeing him indulgently.

"We had a dam good sweat, anyhow," said the Miserable Starkey. "An' for the first pick up of the season your wind wasn't too bad, Bud. I only saw you trying not to be sick twice." He drained his glass and extended lean, hairy legs. "And now I'm for a bath."

"What are you going to do after that?" inquired 'Orace. "I feel like going ashore to-night. How about you, Starkey?"

"Broke."

"Same here. But now I come to think of it——" He rose and limped stiffly to the notice-board. "I thought so."

There was a pause while he scanned notices of dances, advertisements for second-hand motor-bicycles, and reminders about the hour after which no gentleman sits down to breakfast. He indicated the daily list of officers who on application to the Paymaster Captain would be refunded travelling expenses incurred journeying on the public service.

"I thought so. Bud, you miserable plutocrat, how much did you touch the Pusser for after lunch?"

"Not much. An' I owe twice that to a bookie. I——"

"Never mind who you owe it to. How much was it?"

Bud groaned.

"I put in for seven pounds—it was when I had to go to Olympia to make an ass of myself in public: and what with a bit of fluff I couldn't brush off, and bubbly the price it is, and meetin' Sloppy Edmonds

at the 'Goat,' an' one thing an' another, it cost me nearer twenty before——"

"Bud, you're prevaricating. We don't want to hear the story of your misspent youth." Starkey sidled closer to the scrum half of the United Services team and encircled his head with an arm like a steel hawser.

"We don't want to hear of your prowess with a foil nor yet where you took your pleasure. We want to know how much you touched the Pusser for."

The prisoner struggled feebly. "Three pounds seventeen. And he said the blighters at the Admiralty would probably disallow the lot. I dare say they were all there with their fat wives and ugly daughters watching me fencing and enjoying themselves. But when it comes to allowing me my travelling expenses——"

Starkey released him. "Enough, Crœsus; 'Orace—Chops an' Chips to-night!"

"Yes," agreed 'Orace. "Plainly indicated. Chops an' Chips for the Chaps."

"I tell you I owe it all to a bookie," said the prospective host plaintively. "Twice that amount."

"Isn't he a little man?" demanded 'Orace admiringly. "Bettin' with bookies and actin' rorty. Never mind, Bud, we'll let you off cheap to-night. Just a Chop and Chips and a tankard of nut brown and a stall in the Frivolity afterwards."

"Yes," echoed Starkey. "A chop and chips on the cheapers for the chaps."

"A chop and chips is cheap chow for chummy chaps," confirmed 'Orace, contriving to enunciate the

first syllable of each word with a sifflant hiss between his front teeth. "Come on, Bud, get a move on! We're all going to bath and shift into Mallaby Deeleys."

"If it weren't for the fact that dining in the mess gives me the holy pip I'd see you both blowed before I let you make beasts of yourselves at my expense. However, come on——"

He snatched 'Orace's cap off the sofa and rushed up the corridor towards their rooms, dribbling it and yelping: "Feet, forwards, feet!" with the other two in pursuit.

The Pensioner hall porter studying the evening paper inside his little glass-partitioned hutch smiled with fatherly indulgence as the sounds of laughter and scuffling died away.

"Only young the onest," he observed to the blue-jacket messenger. He rubbed his rheumatic knees. "I see many young gentlemen pass laughin' through them doors back in 1914. Laughin' an' carryin' on. . . . There's many as didn't come back an' there's many as come back an' don't laugh same's they used to."

"You must ha' known a lot of officers," said the messenger. "'Eaps, I reckon."

"'Arf the Navy," admitted the hall porter.

Twenty minutes later Bud reappeared, sleek of hair, in blue flannel suit, diffusing a faint odour of embrocation.

"What about that taxi, Mahoney?"

"Alongside, sir," said the hall porter benevolently. "Very good show at the Frivolity this week they tell me. Commander Wilson an' Mr.

Harris, they went last night an' come back, and I 'eard 'em say they'd 'ad a 'earty laugh."

"Did they!" said Bud. He examined the play-bill inside the porter's hutch.

"Lora Levine, the child vocalist. The Sisters Shelviorski in their world-famous balancing feat. Mike, the Human Misery. Hum! George Grayson and his Flock of Fascinating Flappers presents a screaming farce: The Giddy Governess! That's the stuff to give the troops! I don't suppose I shall be able to stop screaming. Come on, chaps!" He turned to the other two prospective revellers. "Chips an' Chops an' the Giddy Governess. How can we bear it?"

"What a night, what a night!" murmured Starkey, leading the way down the steps to the taxi. 'Orace, however, was with difficulty induced to enter the vehicle until he had completed a brief impersonation of Mr. Harry Tate to his own satisfaction and the delectation of the grinning chauffeur.

The taxi, driven along the cobbled thoroughfare at a speed commensurate with the light-hearted nature of its mission, deposited them ten minutes later at the entrance of the only hostelry in the town boasting any pretensions to comfort. It was, however, a shabby enough caravanserai, and why even the most greedy seeker after adventures should exchange the spacious comfort of the Naval Barracks for its dingy lounge with fly-blown mirror and atmosphere of stale food and spirits, neither Bud, 'Orace, nor the Miserable Starkey could venture to give you the faintest idea.

It was, however, with countenances expressing lively anticipation and satisfaction that the trio dis-

missed the taxi and invaded the low-ceilinged bar. Three or four palpable Naval Officers stood before the counter. As many more sat about the fireplace. The new-comers exchanged boisterous greetings with the inmates, and having been supplied with liquid refreshments, were drawn into the cross currents of banter and "shop" that eddied beneath the tobacco smoke. The moment arrived eventually, however, when 'Orace and Starkey found themselves faced with the obligations of men who have consumed drink at the expense of others. They sought Bud, a bubbling briar between his teeth, replaying the afternoon's game in reminiscence with a big-boned Marine subaltern.

"Bud," said 'Orace, "how much did you touch the Pusser for? Starkey and I can't remember."

"Three pounds seventeen and fourpence," said the financier.

"That's a quid each," said Starkey with the impersonal satisfaction of a wrangler arriving at the solution of an involved and unusual problem. "And you can keep the seventeen shillings and fourpence as well. Come in handy for tips——"

Bud sighed, and handed them a £1 note apiece.

"Right," said 'Orace. "Now we needn't sponge on you any more this evening. Have a drink, Bud?"

"Thank you," said the donor. "I don't mind if I do. Pink gin."

It was half-past seven before it occurred to Starkey that he was hungry. Bud had found an old shipmate of North America days and was listening with a wrapt far-away expression in his eyes to a Labrador salmon story. 'Orace, in whom pink gin

was beginning to arouse romantic yearnings, was leaning over the bar counter having a button sewn on his cuff by the priestess of Bacchus who presided over that particular shrine of the deity. She was an anæmic damsel, all too obviously the victim of an inefficient dentist; but as she bent over the task errant wisps of her *coiffure* brushed 'Orace's eyebrow and combined with the pink gin to veil her in a mysterious and delectable glamour of femininity. Furthermore, she permitted her fingers as they plied their task to flutter about 'Orace's wrist with an artless contact that made his pulses quicken; it would, incidentally, have made the pulses of any one of his five sisters quicken even more.

"'Orace!" said Starkey severely. "What about it?"

"What about what?" inquired 'Orace brazenly, stroking the sempstress's hand.

"Chops and chips."

"Go ahead 'n' order 'em. An' a cheesie—egg—hammy—topside—and don't forget to send the boy for the seats at the Frivolity."

Starkey turned to Bud. "Same for you, Bud?"

"I'd like a steak," said the fisherman's audience.

"You can't," said 'Orace. "It doesn't rhyme. I mean, you can't chew *Steak* and Chips on the Cheapers with Chaps. You could chew Chutney an' Chips; or even Cheese and Chops—I mean Chips. But——"

"All right," said Bud resignedly. "A chop, then."

"A chump chop, Bud," said Starkey, as if consoling a disappointed child.

"Quite!" confirmed 'Orace. "But a steak!"

He shook his head sadly and relinquished the bar-maid's hand in favour of his glass. "Nev' do."

Starkey departed on his mission. Bud's friend glanced at the clock and proclaimed that as he was dining at his Captain's house it was time he pushed off.

'Orace and Bud regarded the speaker as if he had announced his immediate intention of entering a cage of lions.

"Good Lord!" said 'Orace with a mixture of awe and commiseration in his tones. "You'd better have a drink, old bird. What's your skipper like?"

"Oh, a Fizzer. His missus is a good scout too. Thanks—whoa! Trouble is I'm not one of these social pests; goin' out to dinner always puts me in a cold sweat; feel as if my braces were carrying away all the time, or wondering if I'd remembered to put on my tie, if you know the feeling?" The prospective diner-out buttoned his coat, finished his drink, and apparently reconciled to his fate departed with an expression of resigned melancholy. Starkey re-entered the bar. "Chops'll be ready in ten minutes. In the meanwhile what about a few snoysters, chaps?"

The chaps signified their approval of the project.

"Do we gnaw the succulent bivalve here?" inquired 'Orace. "Or track him to his lair?"

"Liar," said Bud. "I mean lair."

He donned his hat. "Starkey, do you know the slot of an oyster when you see one?"

"No," retorted Starkey. "But there's an R in the month which means it's shooting season for oysters. You make a noise like a—— 'Orace, can you make a noise like a rocketing oyster?"

"Simps!" He emitted a screech that made the glasses rattle, and called forth indignant protests from the damsel who had been eyeing Starkey with cold disfavour.

He turned to her. "Ethel, my peach, tell me—don't be afraid of admitting it in the presence of these discreet gentlemen—tell us in confidence: have you ever been bitten by a mad oyster?"

"Or gored by a wounded one?" inquired 'Orace, imagination aflame.

"Or knocked down by a runaway one?" substituted Bud.

"I think you're all gettin' silly," said the lady, not without justification.

Starkey sighed contentedly. "It may be; it may be. Wine is a mocker and much learning is a weariness of the flesh. But don't take on, Ethel. I shouldn't be surprised if one of us brought you back a pearl from our venture."

The swing doors clashed to behind them, and they debouched into the High Street beaming ecstatically upon an unresponsive universe. The evening traffic of a dockyard port surged past; blue-jackets, marines and khaki-garbed garrison intermingling with the sparse civilian population and filling the air with a hum of voices.

The three naval officers, obedient to one of the mysterious dictates of their profession, sought the centre of the road and presently came abreast of a blaze of electric lights from the façade of the local music-hall.

Bud halted, and the beribboned and gilded commissioner saluted with a friendly grin.

"Ha! Colonel!" said Bud. "How's the Ashanti wound getting on?"

"Nicely, sir, thankee. I 'opes you gentlemen is comin' to the second show."

"We are, General," said 'Orace. "We but dally with an oyster first."

"And fain would chew a chop, Field Marshal!" supplemented Starkey. "Hallo! What's bitten Bud?"

The officer in question was standing before an easel supporting photographs representing, according to a cardboard announcement, the caste of "The Giddy Governess." The smile had fled from his face and his attitude suddenly stiffened.

"What's up, little man?"

Bud made no reply, and 'Orace shook him gently by the elbow.

"Eh? Oh, nothing! Only—only that girl——"

Starkey and 'Orace examined the photograph Bud indicated.

"What about her?"

"I—she—well, she was one of the doctor's daughters at home, where I live. I knew her when she was more or less a kid. We—er—were rather pals. In fact . . ." Bud coughed. "She went on the stage. I was in the West Indies. My people . . . Rum, isn't it?"

"De'lish rum," assented 'Orace. He examined the photograph with a critical eye.

"Pretty girl, too. Looks a cut above that sort of show, don't you think?"

"She is. She——" Bud scowled fiercely and pointed with his stick to the centre of the group. "That's a nasty looking bit of work."

"That's George Grayson," said Starkey.

"Does he hail from the village, too, Bud—one of the lads, so to speak?"

Bud eyed the features of the comedian with disfavour.

"Huh!" he said, and turned away. His companions gazed after his short, compact figure retreating oysterwards.

"Do you suppose Bud was mashed on the wench?" ventured 'Orace in a husky whisper.

"That," replied Starkey, "would appear to have been the situation—roughly."

Whether their summing up of Bud's feelings was correct or not Bud made no further reference to the incident, and in the back parlour of the tiny oyster bar was moved by a flyblown oleograph of the late Lord Charles Beresford to reminiscences of his early youth.

They finally sat down to dinner an hour after it had been ordered. A waitress with demure reproach in her expression placed what appeared to be a small cinder on a large plate in front of each and a dish containing a substance resembling wisps of cardboard in the centre of the table. "Them's the victuals," said Starkey appreciatively, burying the cinder beneath tomato ketchup. "Give me a chop and chips any day of the week. I don't want any of your five-course dinners."

"Bit overdone, ain't it?" queried Bud.

"An' what do *you* expect, Mr. Barnes?" demanded the waitress. "Ordering chops an' then goin' out an' forgettin' all about them."

"'Twere better to forget and smile," said 'Orace,

stabbing ineffectually at the viand with his fork, "than remember and be sad. But no matter. Bring three foaming tankards, Mabel dear, and the cheesie—egg—hammy-topsides."

"They're off," said Mabel. "Cook's goin' home along of her aunt, bein' ill an' you so late. She cooked the chops an' off with her apron. 'There,' she sez, 'tell 'em they can 'ave bread an' cheese when they done that.'"

"Bread and cheese be it," said 'Orace sadly. "But dally not with the beer."

"She's a nice girl, that," said Starkey as Mabel departed on her quest. "She—she *understands* one, doesn't she?"

'Orace nodded. "Yes, and there's no rot about her either. Tug Willoughby and I took her to see 'The Convict's Daughter' once. She told us about her mother and little sister between the acts—she keeps them on what she earns here."

"Does she!" exclaimed Bud, obviously touched.

"And here she is bringing us our beer!" added 'Orace as one surprised by nobler heights than even filial piety. "Good lass, good lass!"

They finished their meal and contemplated the bill presented by the demure Mabel. "One pound two and sixpence," murmured Starkey, fingering the strip of paper.

"Give her thirty bob," commanded 'Orace magnificently. "That's ten bob each. I like round numbers when I do sums in my head." The others obediently deposited a ten-shilling note on the plate. "You two go ahead and see if the taxi's there," added 'Orace, gathering the contributions. "I'll settle up

this little lot." The dutiful Mabel, who had been affecting complete unconsciousness of this colloquy, was turning down the lights in the deserted grill.

"I'm blowed if I see why——" Starkey began to remonstrate. Bud slipped his arm through the speaker's and drew him towards the door.

"Neither do I. But I believe it's 'Orace's turn, as a matter of fact." They had reached the doorway and turned into the corridor when a faint scuffle followed by a protest, dutiful if perfunctory, reached their ears. Neither looked back. A moment later 'Orace rejoined them with unconcerned mien.

"Paid the bill?" asked Starkey.

"Yes," replied 'Orace.

"That's good," said Bud.

The dimly lit auditorium of the local music-hall was silent when the three entered. The lights indicating the exits burned dully through a blue haze of tobacco smoke, and the orchestra, as if caught in the tense spell that seemed to hold the audience rapt and breathless, was sustained only by the rapid rolling of a kettledrum.

Upon the stage, which was suffused with pink light crossed diagonally from either wing by violet beams of limelight, a man in tights, dusty about the knees and elbows, was balancing a billiard cue on his chin and spinning on its tip a small boy, who revolved, pivoted apparently on his diaphragm, at an incalculable speed. The juggler, not content with this dexterity, maintained contact with five gold-and-silver balls which he threw and caught alternately in such swift sequence that they traced a glowing

ellipse in front of him. Suddenly the spell broke. The juggler uttered a sharp exclamation: the orchestra with a clash of cymbals and a crashing reverberation of the big drum awoke from their trance: the diminutive boy gave a shrill yelp combining relief, self-congratulation and astonishment (presumably at finding himself still alive) and landed on his feet on the stage with a thump.

The audience gasped like one man and clapped frantically. The lights were switched on, and behind the footlights the perspiring juggler, holding the diminutive boy by the hand, bowed repeatedly with tired gratification.

Bud led the way to the seats indicated by a programme-seller.

"That was the last turn but one," said the girl as the curtain fell upon the applause. "'The Giddy Governess' next. You're just in time for that."

"I'm glad we haven't missed the last turn," said 'Orace. "Hardly worth coming if we had, would it, Bud?"

The officer addressed was studying the programme. He grunted abstractedly.

All about them the hum of conversation was punctuated by an intermittent splutter of matches. The feminine element in the audience, inclined towards a naval or military escort, sucked sweets and glanced at neighbouring spectators of its own sex with shrewd, faintly disparaging eyes. Domesticity—the almost aggressive respectability of the married—and the licence of a town peopled by sailors and soldiers rubbed elbows in that smoky, brilliantly-lit place of relaxation. Then the lights were again extinguished

and the hum of voices died away. There was a ripple of movement over the closely packed audience as the couples wriggled more closely against each other's shoulders. The curtain parted and revealed the interior of a dormitory at a young ladies' seminary.

The inimitable Mr. George Grayson had written the dialogue and arranged the scenario of "The Giddy Governess" more with the idea of raising the wind than the moral tone of music-hall drama. He may be said to have undertaken the task with one eye on his creditors and the other, presumably a blind one, on the Lord Chamberlain. Mr. Grayson had a certain crude genius for knowing how far he could go, and he had stumbled upon the great economic truth that the farther he went, up to a point, the better it paid. His crowded audience settled itself in its seats with a subdued titter of anticipatory enjoyment.

"Starkey," whispered 'Orace about half-way through the first scene, as a gust of laughter swept through the house, "are you sure your people would like you to stay?"

There was no answer. With his chin on his tie Starkey slept guilelessly. 'Orace glanced at his other companion in revelry. Bud was leaning forward across his clasped hands, breathing rather quickly through his nose, his face expressionless.

"*Très moutarde*—eh?" ventured 'Orace under his breath.

Bud said nothing.

Mr. Grayson had deferred the moment of his entry until he considered that the Fascinating Flappers, in *negligé* appropriate to the place and the

occasion, had created an atmosphere in which he might appear with advantage. He now appeared, in the rôle of a parachutist who had descended inadvertently through the skylight of the young ladies' seminary, to the lively satisfaction of the Fascinating Flappers and the audience. Each of these must, however, be granted one exception. Bud brought his brows together with a scowl; and one of the Fascinating Flappers, who had been going through her part with a weary, mechanical smirk on her painted face, took advantage of the diversion to indulge in the luxury of a fit of unrestrained coughing into her handkerchief. She was a frail-looking creature, slim as the immature schoolgirl she was supposed to be, slender limbed and graceful. Stage artifice magnified the size and brilliance of her eyes, but it did not conceal the disillusionment and the weariness of the soul behind them.

She put her handkerchief away at length, after a quick furtive glance at it, in time to receive a resounding kiss on her upturned mouth from the gallant parachutist, who was adjusting himself to his novel environment with the aplomb and ease to be expected of him.

"My God!" said Bud.

George Grayson, in the days when he had been a theological student, had lacked neither grace of limb and feature nor charm of manner. But it took more than mere charm to convince a University Don that the signature on a piece of tinted paper was his, when in crude fact it represented Mr. Grayson's maiden attempt at forgery. And the grace of Apollo himself is not proof against the incessant assaults of

whisky over a long course of years. Dissipation and adversity had brutalized his features, hung pouches under his fine eyes, slackened his glib lips. His smile was a leer; the whole man, clad as he was in the black cotton tights and Hungarian jacket popularly conceded to be the costume of a parachutist, with his spidery legs and small protuberant paunch, was an obscenity.

Bud made no further comment till Starkey, awaking refreshed but pugnacious from his nap, announced a profound distaste for the comedian's appearance and was with difficulty restrained by 'Orace from active protest.

"Well, what's the fellow want to paw those girls about for, then?" he demanded, abandoning reluctantly his purposed knight-errantry. "Nasty Bit of Work. I'd go and bash his head for two pins."

"They like it," explained 'Orace.

"Shut up," said Bud. His eyes never left the Fascinating Flapper with the nasty cough.

The screaming farce screamed itself out at length and Bud, 'Orace and the Miserable Starkey found themselves once more in the fresh night air of the street.

"What about a taxi, chaps?" inquired 'Orace.

"What about laying for that Nasty Bit of Work," demanded Starkey, "and knocking his ugly head off? I didn't like the way he carried on with those girls. They were nice girls: I don't care a darn what 'Orace says, I——"

"You dry up," said Bud. "Carry on back, you two, an' order a cold soda for me before the mess

closes. I shan't be long after you"—the speaker fumbled with his cigarette case and extracted a visiting card. "I'm just going to speak to—to an old friend." He vanished in the direction of the stage door.

"I told you he was gone on her," said 'Orace.

"Don't blame him," said Starkey, climbing into a waiting taxi. "Do you suppose he'll slip it across that Nasty Bit of Work? Phew! what a mouth I've got! Home, Jeames!"

Half an hour later, when 'Orace and Starkey were seated on the high fender in the officers' entrance hall of the Naval Barracks, the swing doors opened and Bud appeared. His face was expressionless, and he made off in the direction of his cabin without a glance at his companions of the evening.

"Hi! Bud!" said Starkey. "Here's your cold soda."

Bud retraced his steps like a man walking in his sleep.

"Well?" said 'Orace.

"She's married," said Bud, accepting the glass and staring at it.

"Who to?"

"That swine."

Starkey rose with dignity, walked a few paces across the empty hall, and stopped.

"We are not amused," he said: turned again, and continued his majestic progress bedwards.

VIII

THE DRAINING OF THE SAVE-ALLS

Pap-pap-pap! . . . Pap! . . . Pap-pap! . . .

From the three-hundred yards firing-point came the irregular fusillade of the second detail. The rest of us sat about in the shade of a grove of coconut palms, cleaning rifles, passing round the lampblack, and yarning. Petty Officer Mopham, L.T.O., gave me a hand with my pull-through because we had shot on the same target and were "old ships." He sat down when the operation was complete, nursing his rifle on his knees, the brim of his sun-helmet tilted over his eyes to shield them from the glare.

I settled myself within conversational distance and we both stared at the line of white breakers beyond the firing point, the apple-green sea, and at our anchored ship with her slender foremast raking against a dazzling blue sky. She had been freshly painted; her awnings and side screens were as white as the ensign stiffly extended by the trade wind; every bit of bright-work on the upper-deck winked and twinkled in the sunlight like a jeweller's shop window. No Commander could do more to a ship, and ours, in despair at finding nothing more the hands could do to beautify her, had landed a range-party and sent all the boats away sailing. They were swooping to and fro in the offing while we gazed—

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both whalers, galley and skiff—their sails like the sunlit wings of low-flying swallows.

We contemplated this spectacle, Petty Officer Mopham and I, with complacent, insular and unbounded pride.

“Proper photograph, isn’t she, sir?” he said at length. I agreed. She was all that and more also. He studied our floating home a while longer with narrowed eyes and his lips pursed up judicially. “After fall of that whaler could do with a bit of a pull on the slack. . . . Pendant’s foul of the aerial, too. But she isn’t too bad. You can do a lot if they give you the right sort of stuff to work with. Those awnings are new. That ensign truck’s solid brass. There’s ways and ways of getting to windward of a dockyard.”

There was a note in his voice I recognized of old, and made myself comfortable in the warm sand. No further conversational contribution would be required of me for some time.

“There’s some that tries cad-jolery. I don’t hold with it. They’re human in a dockyard, but they aren’t fools. There’s some things you can get for rum an’ pricks of baccy and such like, but in the long run you may as well go ashore and buy the stuff. It don’t cost much more. There’s a better tack than either of those. . . .” Mopham turned his eyes towards me. They seemed to reflect the unchanging blue of the tropical sky above. There were little whitish streaks about their corners where the sunburn had not penetrated the wrinkles. “Did you ever know Mr. Aughtlone, sir?”

“I know who you mean: I’ve never been

shipmates with him, though. He came into a baronetcy and a lot of money and retired before the war."

"He did. And every year he sends me a Christmas card and I sends him one. He was my Captain once when I was coxswain of a River-class boat. He wasn't no baronet then. Plain Mr. Aughtlone and as good a Captain and as nice-spoken a gentleman as ever I want to serve with. Godfather to my first, he is."

"I didn't know you'd been a Torpedo Coxswain, Mopham."

Mopham nodded. His eyes had strayed down the rifle range to the butts at the point where the waves were breaking. The range had been fouled by a native boat beating round the headland, and the red flag was close-up. The cessation of the firing made the sound of the surf louder along the straight white line of coral sand.

"Six years. I relinquished the rate after the war. My missus says to me, 'Dick,' she says, 'we won't tempt Providence no longer'—she'd taken a notion destroyer work was dangerous, and you know what women are once they get an idea into their heads. She was left a bit of money along of her aunt down at Wandsworth dying, and the extry bob a day didn't tempt her."

The red flag fluttered down the mast, a whistle blew, and the firing broke out afresh.

"You were going to tell me about Mr. Aughtlone," I murmured. Once fairly into the furrow of domestic reminiscence, Petty Officer Mopham usually turned neither to the right nor to the left.

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"Ah! *And* the dockyard. That was what put me in mind of him. . . . Magpie! I saw the bullet strike."

The marking disc flickered black and white in front of the left-hand target. Mopham's keenness of vision was uncanny, but I wished he would stick to the point.

"Mr. Aughtlone was Captain of a boat that by rights ought to have been on the scrap-heap. Her engines was all right, but she'd weathered a typhoon in a commission out East, and she was strained the way no boat could ever recover. Leak! It was drier on the forecastle driving against a head-sea than what it was 'tween decks forward. We went out with the flotilla twice and came back spoutin' water through the plates and the fore mess-deck awash. I never see a ship like her—not even the old *Sanspareil* in a seaway. You know Mr. Aughtlone, sir? Never swore, only 'Desh my wig an' trouser buttons!' Well, 'Desh my wig an' trouser buttons, Mopham,' he says, 'I'll write a letter about this. I've got men livin' aboard of this ship, not performin' seals.' We was never out of oilskins on deck *and* below, and the men didn't fancy it. They started passin' the remark that the ship wasn't safe and all that. The Captain didn't go so far as to say she wasn't safe, but he had his eye on one of the new 'L' class just building; so he wrote his letter, and the Captain (D) sent it along to the Commander-in-Chief, and the Commander-in-Chief *he* sent it to the Admiral Superintendent (I heard it all from a Chief Writer one night at the Lodge), and the Admiral Superintendent turned it over to the Chief

Constructor, and *he* passed the word to a foxy-faced little feller in a Trilby hat with a friend who had a notebook. They come aboard us one forenoon when we was lying alongside the dockyard wall. Sun was over the foreyard, and our Captain had gone aboard one of the other boats, it being her skipper's birthday. But the First Lieutenant and the Artificer Engineer and our Chippy-chap and me walked them around below pointin' out the bits of blue sky and sunshine where properly speakin' you didn't ought to have seen no blue sky nor sunshine neither. She was gapin' like a basket."

In most of Mopham's stories there is a sort of apogee of improbability. He does not hurry you over the curve in the rush of the narrative, compelling his listener's credulity through sheer inability to keep pace with the mounting exaggerations. Not so Petty Officer Mopham. He pauses and stares into your eyes with the solemn candour of a child; and, as I said before, his eyes are as blue as heaven above. He paused now, and with a grave, respectful stare challenged all the powers of unbelief.

"Believe me, like a basket."

"I believe you, Mopham. Go on."

"The feller in the Trilby hat wasn't givin' nothing away. 'Ha!' he says, an' 'Haw!' an' 'Hum!' and poked his nose into corners like a Customs Officer lookin' for eau-de-Cologne or a Flag Captain goin' rounds of a Sunday forenoon. His mate sucked his blacklead and tried to look as if he knew the bow from the stern, which he didn't.

"When they finished, the First Lieutenant took 'em aft into the wardroom, and ten minutes later

when they went over the side they was smackin' their lips and I see the tears in their eyes.

"The First Lieutenant met the Captain at the gangway when he came aboard and told him we'd had visitors. 'Ah!' said the Captain. 'Did you give 'em a cocktail, Number One?'

"'I did,' said the First Lieutenant. 'Foggy mornings. Two apiece. I mixed them myself. Shook 'em to the core.'

"'Desh my wig and trouser buttons,' says the skipper, rubbin' his hands. 'We ought to get a new ship. One of the "L's" just completing.' He slewed around to me. 'Eh, Mopham? How'd you like that?' he says.

"I says nothing, knowin' the Dockyard. Them Nosy Parkers with Trilby hats get promoted for savin' money that by rights ought to be spent on makin' matelows comfortable."

The remaining detail was filing down to the firing-point: the party that had just shot were wending their way towards the shade, discussing scores. The targets danced and shimmered in the hot air that rose from the beach. The cool apple-green of the sea was flecked with patches of purple and brown above beds of weed. Gentlemen in Trilby hats seemed incredibly remote.

Mopham picked up a pebble and threw it at a scurrying land-crab. "We waited. Captain as good as made up his mind which of the 'L's' he was going to get and how he'd have her boats' badges touched up, and all that, when the report of the Dockyard Officers came in—referred by the Commander-in-Chief for remarks.

"There was twenty-two signatures on that bit of paper." Mopham put his head on one side and critically watched the second whaler miss stays rounding a lighter that was moored inshore.

I grew impatient. "What did the report say?"

"Said that the presence of moisture between decks—moisture, mark you—could be attributed to neglect in keeping scuttle save-alls¹ properly drained. Referred for remarks.

"Mr. Aughtlone passed one remark. Only time ever I hear him swear—and sings out for his frock-coat and sword. 'Desh my wig an' trouser buttons,' he says, 'I'll drain their perishin' save-alls. Twenty-two signatures,' he says, wavin' the dossy-air, 'and only two of 'em—Commander-in-Chief and Admiral Superintendent—ever been afloat in their lives!' And with that off he goes to Admiralty House with his chin—you remember his chin, Sir?—stuck out like the ram of a Battle-cruiser.

"Commander-in-Chief kept him to luncheon, being fond of him, and he comes back smilin' and thoughtful-like. 'Number One,' he says, speakin' soft same's a cat purrin' (and when I hears him: 'Gawd help somebody,' I thinks), 'Number One, I been lunchin' along of the Bloke.'

"Did he give up a good drop of port wine?' asks the First Lieutenant.

"Prime. And what's more, Number One, he fell in with my suggestion that, bein' as an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory, next time we goes

¹ A save-all is a small metal trough under each scuttle to catch drops of water that at sea may find their way through the closed rim.

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to sea, we'll take along a couple of them Dockyard save-alls—offish-alls, I should say—and let them watch her leak.'

"' Us choosin' the day? ' croons the First Lieutenant. ' What time the verdant equinox bloweth where it listeth? '

"' Even so,' says Mr. Aughtlone."

"Five hundred yards firing-point."

The voice of the Gunner's Mate reached us above the deep continuous murmur of the surf. The range party was plodding back along the beach with rifles, ammunition and ground-sheets. The figure of a marker moved about the butts with the effect, in those bullet-splashed surroundings, of performing an act of altogether unnecessary hazard.

"Wind's freshening," said Mopham as we brought up the rear of the procession. "You'll want to aim for the right hand edge of the target at 500 yards, sir, with that there rifle you've got. Right hand edge at five o'clock, I reckon." Mopham had become a marksman second-class again for the nonce, and as I wanted the rest of the story free from interruption I led him along to the six-hundred yards firing-point.

"Did you get the right sort of day?" I asked, when Mopham had painted his foresight to his satisfaction and handed me the little bottle of lampblack.

"Certainly we did. A sou'-wester with a nasty cross-sea outside the Needles. We had warnin' of it from the barometer, and the Captain fixed up the trip the day before. At nine a.m. our passengers come aboard; the same two: they was dressed for yachtin'.

"' Permission to proceed in execution of previous

orders,' snaps the Captain, an' Buntin' comes aft with the affirmative five minutes later.

"' Now then,' says Mr. Aughtlone—there was the same kind of purrin' note in his voice I mentioned before—' come up on the bridge, gentlemen, and help me take the ship out of harbour.'

"From what they said when we was goin' down harbour I gathered one had been across to Cowes on the ferry, and the other he went backwards and forwards every day to Gosport where his home was. Otherwise their experience of seafarin' was what you'd call academical."

I nodded.

"There wasn't no sea to speak of in the Solent, and it wasn't till we neared the Needles that our yachtin' gentlemen began to show signs of distress. They was yawnin' fit to dislocate their jaws, and swallerin' their spittle which they tell me is the way you starts to feel it.

"' Now,' says Mr. Aughtlone as the ship begins to dip her bows into it, ' I've no doubt you gentlemen would like to commence your observations.'

"' What observations?' says one, haughty-like, swallering harder'n ever.

"' Observing of our leaks,' says the Captain. ' If you will accompany the coxswain he'll show you the way to the fore mess-deck where, in my experience, the trouble is worst.' Well, they came out to study leaks, an' I suppose they decided they'd better go through the motions, so to speak. The quartermaster had the wheel, and I led 'em down the ladder to the hatch of the stokers' mess-deck. They had a stove alight below, the weather being chilly, and I think

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they must have been burnin' feathers—anyway, there was a funny smell comin' up the hatchway. But I didn't take no notice of that, bein' as it was the stokers' mess-deck. I see them crawl down an' I closed the hatch a-top of them. 'Well,' says the Captain when I came up to the bridge, 'what d'you think of the weather, Number One?'

"' Damned awful, sir,' says the First Lieutenant. 'In fact,' he says, 'if you are thinking of going outside the Needles I think you'd best batten down. For safety,' he says. Wonderful solemn face he had.

"' That's right,' says the Captain, nodding his head. 'Safety first. Ain't that the motter of the Destroyer Force of the British Navy?'

"' Certainly it is,' says the First Lieutenant.

"' Then batten down,' roars the Captain—he slews around to me, 'an' don't stand there grinnin' like a heathen chimpanzee, you what might go to meet your last account any moment along of neglectin' to take seaman-like precautions.'

"' Beggin' your pardon, sir,' I says, 'but I anticipated the order before I come up on to the bridge. The hatchway to the fore-mess deck is battened down.'

"' Oh,' he says, 'is it? Then take the perishin' wheel. We'll do tactics.'

"' We was alone, of course, and what the Channel traffic thought I'm sure I don't know. There's ways and ways of steerin' a boat. There was a lumpy sea and I mishandled her cruel. 'Here,' says the Captain after five minutes of it, 'a joke's a joke; but desh my wig an' trouser buttons, I can't stand on my bridge an' watch this. Come on, Number One, let's

go an' have a cocktail.' They left the Gunner on the bridge, and him and me acted proper fantastic. He dropped his false teeth and broke the plate with laughin' and tryin' to say 'Act British!' at the same time. After ten minutes the Captain comes forward again. 'Now,' he says, 'what's your course?' I sings out the course and he steadies me on it. I knew by his voice he was tired of skylarkin'. 'We'll return to harbour,' he says, 'to enjoy the blessin's of the land and the fruits of our labours.'

"Soon's we got inside the Solent the quartermaster took the wheel, and the Captain motioned to me to follow him down the ladder. We come to the fore hatchway and he give me the order to open up.

"A leadin' stoker came and put his head out. Very likely he wanted fresh air.

"He grinned horrid.

"'Are those two Dockyard officials below?' says the Captain. I don't know where he thought they could have gone to, unless it might be they'd slipped through our gapin' plates and gone overboard.

"'Yessir,' says the Leadin' Stoker—a red-haired Glasgow Irishman he was. He lifts up his finger. I heard a holler groan. Mr. Aughtlone looks at me compunctious. 'Nip down, Mopham, an' tell 'em the danger's over and I hope they'll come aft and have a cocktail.'

"I slips down the hatchway and—oh, my word!"

Mopham rubbed his nose reflectively. "I once helped the fire brigade to put out a fire in a fried fish shop down the High Street, Portsmouth. Put me in mind of that smell, it did. The stove had been pretty-nigh extinguished. There was water swillin'

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about on the deck—water and what-all. There was water everywhere, washing from one side to the other, and the Trilby hat a-bobbin' a-top of the tide. 'Where's all this water come from?' I sings out, forgettin' meself for the moment.

"'Gentleman felt queer,' answers a stoker, 'an' wanted fresh air, so we opened a scuttle to give him a breather and shipped a sea.'

"I hears the holler groan again, and there, stretched on two mess stools and steadied by a couple of the hands, lay our vict—passengers. They had a mess-kettle apiece, but wasn't takin' no account of them. They wasn't takin' much account of anything. I bent over one an' give him the Captain's message. He fetched another groan an' opens his eyes. First thing he saw was the water.

"'Is she sinkin'?' he asks. 'Oh, let me die quiet.'

"'You ain't goin' to die,' I says. 'The Navy's looked after you and brought you back safe. The danger's all over an' the gale,' I says, 'is abatin'.'

"'Thank God,' he says, an' shuts his eyes again."

The pap-papping of the rifles on the firing-point a hundred yards away had ceased. Figures were coming towards us, moving slowly across the loose sand. Petty Officer Mopham measured the rate of their approach with a speculative eye, calculating how much time he had in which to finish his story. In respect of story-telling he was an artist, of the baser sort.

"The First Lieutenant got 'em aft, dried their clothes and opened a couple of quarts of champagne—so the steward tells me. Time we was abreast of

Fort Blockhouse they was up on the bridge thankin' the Captain for savin' their lives. Liquor takes effect very quick on an empty stummick and strong wine is a mocker, as the sayin' is.

"Don't mention it," says the Captain, his eyes on the slips where one of them new boats was completin', red-leaded the colour of a new flower-pot. 'Don't mention it. We all carries our lives in our hands when we goes to sea in this hooker. But you understand, gentlemen, I take no unnecessary risks. Safety first is our motto aboard of these craft.'

"An' a very good one too," says Notebook, waggin' his head."

The voices of the approaching range-party mingled with that of the narrator. Petty Officer Mopham rose, adjusting his rifle sling.

"And what did the Dockyard do?" I asked anxiously.

"Condemned us as unseaworthy. Mr. Aughtlone got one of the new boats and took me an' the First Lieutenant along with him. Same Dockyard fitted her out. I'd have liked the Queen o' Sheba to have seen the brass they put into her: *an'* me-ogany fittings. . . . Might have been the Royal Yacht. Sunk by a German mine in '17, she was. . . . First detail on the firing-point? Ayc—aye. . . ."

IX

THE LEG-PULLER

GOVERNMENT departments have been known in their lighter moments to exchange departmental jests. But the individual is not encouraged to be funny at their expense. It has been attempted from time to time; but this is a game in which he who laughs last laughs loudest. And the Government department generally laughs last. There is, however, an exception to every rule of life. The exception in the instance I am about to relate was John Octavius Peglar, citizen of the United States of America. For him was reserved the peculiar distinction of having pulled the leg of the British Admiralty—or, anyhow, one of its departments—and he “got away with it.”

He did not look a humorist. Few really funny people do. Moreover, he had no intention of being funny at the Admiralty's expense—up to a point. The Admiralty plainly asked for it. The doubt in my mind is the precise point at which John Octavius decided to give them what they asked for.

He was an urbane, clean-shaven, little man, wearing rimless pince-nez, precise and businesslike in an unobtrusive way, as befitted the head of a big American business firm giving occupation, chiefly in accountancy, to some hundreds of employees, and controlling several millions of dollars.

John Peglar was in London, transacting business on behalf of his firm, when Great Britain declared war on Germany. Apart from business considerations Mr. Peglar decided this did not call for any active steps on his part. He was perfectly content to let Great Britain and Germany fight while he continued to transact business. But one fine day the *Lusitania* was sunk, and Mr. Peglar awoke to certain vital aspects of the brawl he had not hitherto considered. He gave his own country forty-eight hours and then approached a certain influential Englishman of his acquaintance, with whom he spent a quarter of an hour in private conversation. Emerging from his friend's office he dispatched two cables: one to his business partner in New York, the other to his wife. He then walked to the Admiralty and sent his card up to an official with a note from his friend. The official looked up from the note as Mr. Peglar was admitted, and scowled at him.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

"I understand you are a Canadian?"

"Er—yes," said Mr. Peglar.

"And you wish to join the British Navy as a Paymaster in the Royal Naval Reserve, having failed for the Army on account of eyesight?"

"Yes," said Mr. Peglar again.

"Have you any experience of accountancy?"

"I know the first four rules of arithmetic," was the modest reply from the Head of the firm of Peglar and Ziegland.

"So much the better. How would you like to be the Paymaster of an armed Boarding Steamer?"

"I could tell you better after I'd been one for a while."

"It's of no consequence. You will be appointed to-night. Please leave your address. Good morning."

"Good morning." In the courtyard outside Mr. Peglar stopped and gazed up at the soot-grimed windows from which King Charles I had emerged on to the scaffold. A pigeon swooped past, nearly brushing his shoulders with its wings. "Marvellous!" said Mr. Peglar in an awed voice. Whether he referred to the tameness of the pigeon, or the historical associations of his surroundings, or his recent interview, I am unable to say.

Once more that day Mr. Peglar gave vent to the same expression of emotion, when some hours after he had visited a Naval outfitter, a cardboard box was delivered at the hotel where he was staying. He bore it up to his room, and in its rococo privacy surveyed himself with an expressionless countenance in front of a long mirror, garbed in the uniform of a British Naval Officer.

"Marvellous!" repeated Mr. Peglar.

This is not a war-story, or one might be tempted to enlarge on some of Mr. Peglar's early experiences, assisting to conduct a blockade of the German coast. Doubtless he found them marvellous, although he did not say so. Nothing, not even sea-sickness, shook his imperturbable and enigmatical urbanity. But on the subject of the British naval system of accountancy he permitted himself some comments to the Leading Victualling Assistant, who composed his Staff. He spent a forenoon examining the ledger,

cash, clothing and victualling accounts, the butt of a cigar between his teeth.

He sighed as he closed the last book. "I stood not long ago beneath the window out of which King Charles the First stepped to execution. I was conscious of the associations with the past which surround Englishmen so closely on all sides. This goes one better. This links one up with Noah and the Ark. It's a fine system, but cumbersome."

"Yessir," said the Leading Victualling Assistant without the least idea what Mr. Peglar was talking about, and bore the books away.

Mr. Peglar found that the task of feeding, clothing, and paying a ship's company of fifty souls did not present any very unusual difficulties. He kept the ledger, checked the Leading Victualling Assistant's accounts, rendered interminable and apparently purposeless returns to the Admiralty. In leisure moments he perused, the inevitable cigar between his teeth, a massive tome that appeared to afford him inexhaustible interest. It was called "The King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions."

Thus two months passed when a cloud rose above the horizon of Mr. Peglar's serenity. A deputation waited on him from the Lower Deck with a request for fresh meat. Owing to the service on which the ship was employed and the fact that she was not fitted with a refrigerator, officers and men had been compelled to subsist chiefly on tinned comestibles.

The ship being still at sea, out of sight of land, Mr. Peglar thought the request somewhat unreasonable. The British bluejacket was new to him. He temporized with the deputation and promised them

their fill of fresh meat the first time the ship communicated with the land. He reported the interview to the Captain. "They tell me they wouldn't be surprised if scurvy broke out 'most any time," concluded Mr. Peglar, eyeing his commanding officer through his glasses with impenetrable gravity. The Captain, an ex-Merchant Service Skipper holding a Commander's Commission in the Royal Naval Reserve, burst into a guffaw. "Scurvy, my foot. They've fed like lords ever since the war started; I'd like some of 'em to have been at sea with me when I was a youngster. Windjammers. . . . Scurvy! Well, well! Still, we've got to keep 'em happy, I suppose. We shall be near an island in the Northern Hebrides by noon to-morrow. I'll lower a boat and you can go ashore and see what you can do."

Accordingly the following day the ship hove to, and Mr. Peglar, after a perilous passage which nearly ended in the boat being dashed to pieces on the rocks, landed on a desolate and barren island. He approached the only habitation in sight, a cottage built of turf with a reed thatch. An old deaf woman came to the door, and Mr. Peglar explained his mission. The old woman understood only Gaelic, and was under the impression that the island was being raided by Germans. The subsequent negotiations took some time, but Mr. Peglar succeeded in conveying his requirements and in paying for eight sheep. The old woman waved a wrinkled hand at the bleak hillside, indicating that her visitor might help himself.

Mr. Peglar went back and collected three of the boat's crew. With their aid he succeeded, after two

hours and a half of the most violent physical exertion in his experience, in cornering five bleating muttons, and conveyed them, struggling wildly, to the boat. He broke his glasses in the course of the mêlée, and finally arrived on board dishevelled and exhausted, but mildly triumphant; his flock were collected in an improvised pen, and Mr. Peglar called for a volunteer butcher.

As has been said, he was new to that most baffling of all human enigmas, the processes of the blue-jacket's mind. Within five minutes of their arrival on board the sheep had been adopted by the ship's company, christened, ornamented with bows of ribbon, and fed variously upon cigarettes, condensed milk, tinned vegetables, and haricot beans. Mr. Peglar's supplications for their execution fell on shocked and outraged ears. They were the ship's pets, and not a hand would any man raise, except to fondle them.

John Octavius Peglar's jaw took a hard line. It was unfamiliar to his shipmates, but quite a number of men in Wall Street would have recognized it and steered clear. He went down to the First Lieutenant's cabin. "Say, Number One," he said, standing in the doorway and breathing through his nostrils. "Say, can I borrow your automatic revolver?"

"What's up?" inquired the startled First Lieutenant.

"Well, these darned sailors asked for fresh meat"—Mr. Peglar slipped the weapon, which the other extended, into his pocket—"and—and *they're going to have it.*"

In due course, the sheep having been consumed, Mr. Peglar rendered his accounts to the Admiralty. They were models of what accounts should be, but in the eyes of Whitehall they lacked one essential detail. Mr. Peglar had omitted to take on charge, and expend by the simple process of throwing overboard, the "arisings" of the sheep.

Now "arisings" are an important item of Naval store accounts. They represent what is left over. For instance, the "arisings" of a candle is a puddle of wax, which is the property of the State. The "arisings" of the sheep after they had been skinned, cut up and eaten were also, properly speaking, the property of the State. In this and similar cases the State was prepared to waive the joys of actual possession provided it was made clear that they had not been disposed of in such a way as to benefit an individual. In other words, provided they were duly certified as thrown overboard. This Mr. Peglar, with his New World scorn for non-essentials, had omitted to do.

A few weeks elapsed and the accounts were returned with an official request that it might be stated by the Accountant Officer how the "arisings" of sheep, five in number, had been disposed of. Mr. Peglar was unfamiliar with the term. He summoned the Leading Victualling Assistant to explain. The Leading Victualling Assistant explained, in one terse Anglo-Saxon word that carried complete enlightenment.

"Well!" said Mr. Peglar. "They can search *me* for them. Do they think I've eaten them, anyway?"

"Couldn't say, sir," replied his Staff helpfully.

"I'll write and ask them," said Mr. Peglar, and did so.

The ensuing correspondence need not be repeated in detail. It reached its climax when Whitehall, having accused Mr. Peglar of attempting flippancy, was told by that urbane gentleman that they wouldn't have thought so if they had seen him handling the First Lieutenant's automatic revolver in the sheep-pen. Then Whitehall wearied of the jest after the manner of a Great Government Department who felt that the thing had gone far enough. In curt official phraseology Mr. Peglar was bidden to account for the "arisings" or pay for them. Further, he was informed, in no uncertain terms, that the correspondence on the subject must cease. Whitehall then, deciding that it had laughed last, turned its attention to other matters.

Again Mr. Peglar's smooth jaw took on that ominous prominence. "No, sir!" said the head of the firm of Peglar and Ziegland. "Not my money. But if it's "arisings" you want you shall have them."

The ship was then at Dundee, refitting. Mr. Peglar went ashore and requested a policeman to direct him to the nearest slaughter-house. Here Mr. Peglar interviewed a gentleman in ensanguined overalls and explained his mission. "Equivalent to about five sheep," he concluded. The gentleman indicated a heap of assorted arisings and invited Mr. Peglar to help himself. Mr. Peglar filled five sacks and drove them down to the ship in a cab. Here he transferred the contents to a packing-case, nailed it up, and addressed it to the Admiralty Official whose

signature ornamented the recent official correspondence. Then feeling in need of refreshment he repaired to the Wardroom.

The First Lieutenant proffered him an evening newspaper.

"America's entered the war," he said.

Mr. Peglar looked relieved. "Then I guess I'll get along and pack my grip." He rose and moved towards the door. The First Lieutenant looked surprised.

"Why? Where are you going?"

Mr. Peglar paused in the doorway.

"America," was the brief reply. "Right now." The curtain swung to behind him and a dry, unfamiliar chuckle.

John Octavius Peglar had laughed last.

X

THE LOOK

ABLE SEAMAN JOSEPH TORCH, one of a training class requalifying for Seaman Gunner, was smoking an after-breakfast pipe outside the Gunnery School classrooms when the Gunner's Mate of his section touched him on the shoulder.

"Field-gun's crew this afternoon, Torch. Gun-carriage for officer's funeral. We'll have a run through the drill this forenoon."

Joe hooked a forefinger round the stem of his pipe, removed the mouthpiece an inch from his lips, and nodded acquiescently. He was a clean-skinned, hazel-eyed young man, tall and straight, with a certain sedateness of manner that set him a little apart from his fellows. He was standing alone when the Gunner's Mate addressed him, watching with grave, meditative contemplation a barracks cat pretending to stalk sparrows.

The prospect was not distasteful to Joe; he was glad of a change from the monotony of the training class, and he cherished the partiality of his degree for funerals in general. Of this particular one he knew no details, neither was anyone likely to vouchsafe them to him. His business was to assist in dragging the gun-carriage and its burden from the hospital to the graveside, preserving, according to the preamble of the Gunner's Mate who drilled the firing-party,

“an aspect cheerful but subdued.” He was chosen for the task, as he was aware, because he was tall and well set up, and would add to the general impressiveness of the deliberately spectacular ceremony whereby the Navy takes leave of its dead.

It was no concern of his that a youthful Lieutenant had been nipped by the cable when mooring ship a week previously. Death was death, and he had seen so many good men die. True, each man’s death was the intimate concern of somebody, but this was a matter outside the range of his own susceptibility, passing him by, as it were.

That afternoon, however, the shadow of human bereavement fell darkly upon his senses for the first time.

The gun-carriage was drawn up in the yard outside the hospital mortuary. The crew and firing-party, standing at ease and yarning in undertones, saw the figures of two women in black walk through a side gate, cross the yard and enter the building.

“One of them’s his girl,” explained the pensioner gate-keeper.

The whisper ran round. His girl and her sister. She’d gone to take leave of the coffin. The pall-bearers and officer-mourners stood about in groups with solemn faces, or moved listlessly to and fro, the ferrules of their sword-scabbards clinking and their epaulettes glinting in the sun. A couple of carriages with closed blinds drew up in the road outside. A gentleman with reddish-rimmed eyes and a tall hat with a broad mourning band got out, and was introduced to several officers. Then an undertaker’s em-

ployee emerged from the little red-bricked building with an air of restrained professional briskness.

"Might as well be makin' a start," he said to the Gunner's Mate. "Bearers?"

The Gunner's Mate ran his eye over the lines of men at the drag-ropes; he touched six on the elbow and motioned them towards the door of the mortuary. Joe was one.

Bare-headed, they brought the coffin out on their shoulders, inside arms encircling waists, the other raised to steady their load. The tense stillness was broken by the sound of their boots shuffling confusedly on the gritty paving stones. Outside, in the road, one of the horses whinnied. The escort came to the salute with a clash.

They had laid the coffin on the carriage, and Joe found himself the last to adjust the lashings securing it beneath the white ensign. Something made him raise his eyes towards the mortuary, and he saw, standing in the doorway, dressed in deep mourning and half supported by her companion, the lover of the dead man.

Perhaps until that moment she had not realized to the full the utter irrevocability of death. It seemed as if her numbed senses were aware for the first time that the dead was about to pass from her sight for ever. She stood staring at the flag-draped gun-carriage with a sort of incredulous horror in her eyes—a look that conveyed a realization of loss so overwhelming in its intensity as to transcend sorrow itself. The procession was forming up. The band and firing-party were moving off. The gun's crew stood at attention at the drag-ropes. No one saw her but Joe.

Pity, embarrassment, and a certain renewed hostility to that erstwhile familiar foe, Death, for breaking a young girl's heart, passed in turn through Joe's mind. The sensations were succeeded by something even more poignant. An unfamiliar feeling like a pain: loneliness. Utter loneliness. In all the world, neither living nor dead, could he, Joe Torch, summon that look into a woman's face. Not if he were to vow eternal celibacy. Not if he were to die to-morrow. . . . With a roll of muffled drums the band ahead crashed out the heart-breaking grandeur of Chopin's funeral march. Joe threw his weight on to the drag-rope as they came to a steep incline, and the dull rumble of the limber at his heels seemed to add to the sudden realization of what he had missed in life.

He hadn't got a girl.

Never till then had he wanted to have one. He had always felt a mild contempt for the fellows who promenaded the High Street in the evenings with freshly-ironed blue-jean collars and decorous-eyed maidens hanging on their arms. For the even more highly domesticated, wheeling the perambulator and carrying a "spud-net" with the week's shopping in it, he knew only pity. Once in a way, it is true, he sought feminine society of a kind, but it was in a different way, and there was nothing about these lights-of-love on which a man could hang either an ideal or a memory.

That look had done it. A fellow-being's soul had reached out in vain anguish after its mate, and he had somehow intercepted the yearning, fruitless appeal. It awoke unexpectedly a deeper need than any he

had known before. In the ordered universe, as Joe knew it, there was suddenly a void. Life, that he had been content to accept as a succession of commissions and messmates, pay-days, qualifying courses and promotions, was instantly purposeless. And Joe knew that only one thing could fill the void, set a star above a man's endeavour, comfort the childish longing that cried to itself in his heart—a woman. A good woman.

He didn't know one.

He wondered, as the procession wound slowly through the squalid streets, how you set about it. Was it luck or effrontery that secured other chaps their young ladies? And having secured the young lady, how were you to know she was what you wanted? Dimly he was aware that this profound and novel exigency was not a thing to be met with compromise. It must be the right girl or no girl at all. How was he to find her? Supposing he didn't, was this poignant need going on within him for ever?

He raised his sombre eyes from the ground and for a moment forgot his preoccupation in the interest of the passers-by. Every window framed peering faces. Men on the pavement lifted their hats as the gun-carriage went past them, boys at play shyly doffed their caps, workmen painting the door of a public-house, tradesmen delivering their goods; on all sides he saw that respectful salutation. He wondered a little what was in their minds. Fear perhaps. They were afraid of dying: trying to propitiate the grim enemy of mankind by baring their heads in his presence. Cowards! Nobody bared their heads that night on Zeebrugge Mole. . . . Cowards, the whole

lot of them. Why were they afraid of dying? He wasn't afraid. But the next moment his thoughts swung back into their old channel, and he knew that, under certain circumstances, he would dread death to the pitch of abject cowardice. Perhaps it was as well he hadn't found that girl if it meant funkng dying. It was men like him who went over the bags kicking a football; who volunteered for a forlorn hope for the fun of the thing; who died jesting, as he had seen men die; who lived, because single-hearted they could bluff death.

But when the afternoon's sombre task was fulfilled and he had had his tea, Joe found a strange restlessness still pervading his normally tranquil spirit. The conversation of his messmates (he was a better listener than a talker) was concerned with cricket scores. For once the prowess of Kent's slow bowler left him unmoved. He turned with impatience from a disquisition on Surrey's batting averages delivered by a Leading Seaman whose maternal uncle had been a groundsman at the Oval, and who might therefore be reasonably expected to know what he was talking about. It was Joe's watch ashore. Perhaps outside the gates of the dockyard he might find some distraction that would quiet this insistent need that he could not define, but which refused to be comforted by either strong tea or tobacco. He'd go "ashore" and watch the couples in the street, have an hour at the cinema, drink a pint of beer perhaps.

No, on second thoughts he'd leave beer alone. He was normally a temperate man, but something told him that to start drinking in the queer mood he was in meant you went on drinking. And once

drunk God knew what a man mightn't do, feeling the way he was.

Outwardly self-contained and reflective as usual, Joe rubbed a forefinger and thumb over the scarcely visible fair bristles on his chin and decided on a quick shave. Then, having cleaned his boots, shifted into his best suit of serge and squared-off collar and black silk, he stood for a moment before the glass adjusting his row of medals, tucking the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal under the black silk so that it was the least conspicuous of all. He took his Humane Society medallion with its blue ribbon out of a little case, looked at it for a moment and put it back. After all, what did a fellow want to go swanking about for with all those things on his chest? He only got it for pulling a drunken fool out of the Medway, anyhow. . . .

He stood contemplating himself curiously in the mirror. So this was Joe Torch . . . all dressed up and nowhere to go, as the saying was. He didn't feel as if it was Joe Torch, somehow. The tall, well-knit figure, the brooding eyes beneath the level brows, the ruddy, wholesome-coloured face—yes, that was him, all right. But he didn't *feel* the same, somehow.

He turned to see a room-mate's quizzing eyes upon him.

"Goin' to take Mary Pickford out for a fish supper, Joe? You ain't arf the bleedin' masher!"

"Whose business is it 'oo I takes out to supper?" demanded Joe, flushing, astonished at his own vehemence.

His friend's jaw dropped. Such a retort from Joe Torch was as unexpected as it was damping.

"*All right!*" was the rather lame reply. "Don't take on about it, cully. No offence, Joe."

But Joe had stalked off in the direction of the gates, and the friend lost no time in spreading the "buzz" round the block that Joe Torch was contemplating matrimony with the girl at the saddler's shop, corner of High Street, whose hair resembled a fair but untidy bird's nest.

Joe, unconscious of the interest of his messmates in his affairs, caught a tram at the dockyard gates and was conveyed to the Town Hall, about that hour the rendezvous of sailors and marines whose evening's relaxation partook of itinerant dalliance with the fair sex.

Having disembarked from the tram, however, Joe turned his steps towards the centre of the town, where the evening life of the dockyard port ran thicker and more varied. The narrow streets were thronged by men of the fleet and garrison. The public-houses had opened their doors, and the beer-cadgers, seedy-looking wasters with hands in their trouser-pockets and grimy neckerchiefs, clustered round the doorways with watchful eyes for old acquaintances. Paper boys dodged to and fro with the latest cricket scores. The odour of fried fish floated out into the evening air.

Joe walked slowly for a while, taking in the whole scene with observant eyes. Occasionally he gave a sidelong nod of greeting to an old shipmate, but spoke to none. Giggling shop-girls on their way home, arm-in-arm down the centre of the narrow street, ogled the tall young sailor with laughing encouragement.

"I shall have a bit of supper at home and see if I can't find a nice boy to take me to a movie," said one loudly to her companion, and glanced back daringly over her shoulder.

But Joe gave no sign of having heard. That wasn't what he'd come ashore for: spooning in a movie. . . . Not much.

What *had* he come ashore for, anyway?

For the life of him he didn't know. He was looking for somebody; of that much he was painfully aware. All his faculties seemed to be concentrated on a tense scrutiny of the passers-by. To observe them better he took his stand in the empty doorway of a shuttered shop. He was looking for a girl; he might as well admit it. Was she fair or dark, short or tall, merry-eyed or sad? Hanged if he knew. He might stand there for a week—a lifetime. . . . He was a fool.

For nearly half an hour he remained motionless, meditatively puffing his pipe, his hands behind his back. The hum of a multitude of voices, the sharp clang of the trams a block away, the plaintive twanging melody of a hurdy-gurdy somewhere out of sight, the sharp irritated "toot!" of taxis, blended in a confused murmur that made consecutive thought impossible. The light began to fade and gradually the crowds thinned.

Joe became conscious of hunger. There was a little beef-and-ham shop he sometimes patronized, with trays of peas and rissoles sizzling behind the windows. He'd go along and have a bite. There was a greasy-fingered young woman there, daughter of the proprietor, who took an interest in him. She

served him maternally with the best cuts, and in a lull in her duties watched him with a kind of wistful solicitude while he ate. Her name was Agnes. So intense was the loneliness possessing him that he wondered for a moment whether he wouldn't be driven to compromise after all. He allowed his fancy to play with Agnes while he walked; her square, strong body, her wide mouth with its red lips and defective teeth, the contrast between her toil-worn hands and the curious whiteness of her forearms.

No. Not Agnes. He groaned inwardly and halted in irresolution on the kerb at a corner where trams went clanging past. The pavement was narrow, and behind him the door of a tavern opened, letting out a rush of warm beer-laden air and the riot of a gramophone's song.

Not Agnes, though she was a straight enough kind of girl. He was aware at that moment of a figure standing beside him: a girl in a dun-coloured belted waterproof and a shabby velour hat. She appeared to be waiting for a tram, but Joe, glancing down at her averted profile, saw that she was covertly observing the policeman on point-duty from beneath her eyelashes. Her face, as much of it as Joe could see under the narrow brim of the worn hat, was colourless and tired-looking. She carried a shopping basket containing a few small parcels.

Now the process of that mysterious network of instinct and desire, memory of things immemorial, vision of the infinite future, which the Spirit of God irradiates and the scientist defines as Natural Selection, must ever remain a supreme mystery. What forced this girl upon Joe's consciousness was the line

of her narrow shoulders, a little relaxed with fatigue, their angularity apparent through the drab-coloured covering. It conveyed a wordless appeal to his robust manhood. On the instant his forlorn state seemed merged, without word or look exchanged, in that of the solitary being at his side.

There was no sudden shock of discovery. He was unaware that the miracle he sought had taken place. Nothing within him said: "Behold the woman!" Yet he stood rooted to the spot, filled with a complete and compassionate understanding of her need. If she moved he would have moved with her. He would have interposed himself unthinkingly between that frail figure and the crash of a ruined universe.

The doors behind him again swung open. Forms stumbled out on to the pavement: two stokers and an Ordinary Seaman, guffawing and mumbling profanity. The latter lurched unsteadily and brushed roughly against the girl.

She turned on him in a flash, but Joe was quicker. His hand gripped the reveller's elbow like a vice and with a jerk sent him reeling across the roadway.

"Ain't the street wide enough for you, without you givin' offence to a lady?" roared Joe. "Come back 'ere, if it ain't, an' I'll use you to widen it."

The astonished Ordinary Seaman, accepting both remonstrance and unexpected propulsion as part of the scheme of things in an altogether unnatural universe, continued in the path of acquired momentum and vanished unquestioning round the corner. His friends blinked at his disappearing form and thence to Joe; from his stalwart form to the speechless girl; shook their heads solemnly at one another and with

tipsy dignity re-entered the portals of the public-house with the air of men who would say: "These things be too high for us."

Joe turned to the girl with apologetic protectiveness.

"You must excuse them, miss. They're a bit fresh. There's some as don't know how to behave when they see a young lady about—them that can't tell a young lady from the—the other sort."

A pair of hard young eyes considered him with fury that gave place to suspicion, then to incredulity . . . softened and unbelievably filled with sudden tears. The policeman, who had hitherto affected unconsciousness of the young lady's presence, held up a tram and two motor-cars for an unnecessary thirty seconds while he watched, without any finesse of concealment, the climax of a scene that appeared to afford him considerable non-professional interest.

With a hurried movement that was partly mechanical and yet somehow suggested obedience to a starved instinct, the girl slipped her hand inside Joe's arm.

"Come away," she said in a choked, breathless voice. "Somewhere . . . somewhere. . . ."

Joe made no reply. For a moment it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world that this unknown girl's arm should be resting in his; that they should be walking side by side along the darkling, almost deserted street. And she, after her queer gasping utterance, was silent too, trying to keep step with his sedate stride, her eyes downcast.

They walked on for several minutes.

"I was goin' to have a snack of something to eat,"

said Joe at length, "when you—when we——" He broke off and looked down at her. "Maybe you could fancy something?"

A curious calm seemed to have settled on his mind. A sense of having reached the tranquil security of harbour after a long and wearisome passage. He felt no elation or excitement; a deep contentment filled his soul, leaving no room for any other emotion.

She stopped and searched his face in the light of a street lamp. He met her stare calmly. She was very young—perhaps twenty. A pale, thin face with rather high cheek-bones. But her eyes were older than his. It was as if her mind alone worked behind them and her heart rarely. All her wit and an experience of life Joe somehow felt outweighed his were in that wordless scrutiny.

"You—you ain't . . . makin' . . . no mistake, are you?" she said slowly.

Joe continued to return her gaze. The child that remains irradicable in the heart of all sailors, whatever their lives or age or rank, was in his face then, plain for a fool to read. He did her high honour in his very simplicity.

"No, miss."

She dropped her eyes and seemed to reflect, a colourless lower lip caught on one sharp tooth. For nearly a minute she remained apparently lost in contemplation of the toe of a worn shoe, while Joe waited, his hands behind his back, considering her with patient kindness.

She raised her head at length, quickly, as if her mind was made up.

"I'm starvin' hungry," she said, and for the first time they smiled at each other.

She slipped her hand inside his arm again.

Joe hesitated. The beef-and-ham shop was all right for him, but here was a young lady plainly superior to such surroundings. Besides, there was Agnes. . . .

"Maybe you knows some place," he ventured. "Quiet like——"

This time she appeared nonplussed.

"I mostly take my meals at home," she admitted, and then laughed softly. "But let's find a place—you know; not smart an' not too noisy. Come along, there's bound to be one somewhere."

They found it at length, guided by a dimly illumined sign over a doorway, and passed up a narrow stairway into a room lit by a single gas flare. The three or four small tables, laid with coarse cloths and cruets, were unoccupied. They had the apartment to themselves.

Joe ordered poached eggs and rashers and tea. They sat down under the gas jet and their eyes met. The girl rested her elbows on the table.

"What's your name?"

"Joe. Joe Torch."

She nodded, considering him anew.

"Mine's Veronica Mortimer," she said slowly. "I was in business in London. I come down here for a change of air."

Her eyelids flickered.

Joe leaned back in his chair and the medals on his jumper made a little clink.

"I reckon I was lookin' for you. I don't know

exactly how it was. . . . It come over me sudden this afternoon. We was buryin' a bloke. Kinder lonely feelin'. . . . 'Tisn't easy to explain, not havin' felt that way before——"

He stopped short, suddenly embarrassed.

The girl said nothing, but her expression had changed and softened. The hardness left her eyes.

"Ain't you—ain't you got a woman?"

"Not me!" Joe shook his head emphatically. "I don't want none of that . . . I want . . ." A boyish perplexity creased his brows. He thought for a moment. "I reckon I was jest lookin' for you."

She stirred restlessly and lowered her eyes. She had laid aside her rainproof coat, and beneath the cheap blouse her bosom rose and fell quickly. She drew in her breath as if to reply, but no words came that were audible to Joe. Silence fell upon them both for a space. The rashers and tea arrived and they ate with appetite. She poured Joe out his cup and handed it to him with a little smile.

"Sugar? I don't know if you've got a sweet tooth."

"I have. Four lumps, please. That's queer, ain't it!"

"What?"

"You not knowin' that!"

"But how could I know?"

Joe stirred his cup reflectively.

"'Course—you couldn't. But it don't seem natural, somehow. . . . Seems as if you did ought to know everything 'bout me."

"P'raps I do," she answered quietly, sipping her tea and watching him over the brim of the cup.

“’Cept little things—like this. Tell me where you got them medals. What was you like when you was little.”

Nothing loath, Joe recounted the story of his life—his childhood in an Industrial Training Ship, the succession of commissions at home and abroad that had made up his life since. Of his very early childhood he could remember little. He recalled playing up on the hillside overlooking the Medway, amid the smoke of cement works and the narrow strips of chalky soil that bristled with cabbage stalks. His mother died when he was very little, and his father took on with a woman who drank. A pensioner of the Boer War, his father, wounded in the head. It made him an easy prey to the woman who drank. But he was a fine figure of a man and warm-hearted.

“Now,” he said when he had finished, “that’s all about me. How about you?”

She stared into her empty cup.

“Does it matter what I am—what I’ve been? Can’t you take me on trust, just the way you see me now——?”

With an abrupt movement she put both her hands over her face.

Joe stared at the thin, ringless fingers.

“I don’t trouble. It don’t seem to matter. I knows you’re good, an’ that’s what matters to me. I was sick of the other sort : the sort us matelows has to turn to when we wants a bit of company—them like me as hasn’t no young lady.”

She lowered her hands and clasped them in her lap.

"When you met me a while back was you lookin' for—for that sort?"

"No. An' what's more, you knows it. I was lookin' for you."

For the third time she searched his face with that terrible sophistication in her young eyes. Then, with a suggestion of panic, she rose to her feet and began to fumble with her rainproof coat.

"I best get home," she said hurriedly. "You—I——" Joe felt her tremble as he helped her on with the worn garment. "You've been kind to me. I thank you for the supper. I was tired and a bit gone when you found me. Maybe that's why I come. . . . But it's gettin' late. . . ."

He stood under the flickering gas jet, looking down at her from his stalwart height. An inexpressible contentment seemed to radiate from his personality.

"This ain't goin' to be the last time. I gets leave to come ashore every other night. You an' me. . . . You an' me. . . ."

He appeared unable to continue the picture his imagination had conjured up.

"Every other night?" she echoed. "Like this? Just you an' me talkin' quiet. Havin' a walk in the country maybe sometimes. Goin' out on top of a tram . . . ?"

Joe nodded delightedly.

"That's right! All them things, us two."

He embraced the deserted room in the crude flare of the gaslight with a gesture that flung a leaping shadow athwart the walls.

"Every other night?" They were descending

the narrow stairway, and she seemed to be speaking more to herself than her companion. "Yes, I could manage that." She spoke musingly as if deep in some intricate calculation. "I've got to manage it." And slid her arm inside his as they stepped out into the lamp-lit street.

They scarcely spoke during the twenty minutes' walk through avenues of silent houses while she guided him with a nod of her head and a gentle tightening of the pressure on his arm.

They walked leisurely beneath the quiet stars, clinging as atoms cling in obedience to uncomprehended laws. They were like waifs brought face to face in the loneliness and intricacy of an unknown forest. They came together in the simplicity of children, yet stirred by vast forces older than the ground they trod.

"You mustn't come no farther," she said at length.

"That's as you wish," he replied.

They stood facing one another at a corner of deserted streets. Two rows of mean houses stared blindly at each other on either side of a steep hill. In the light of a young moon the chalky surface of the road gleamed white.

"Well . . ." said Joe, hesitated and stooped to kiss his companion.

She stepped back quickly.

"No, you mustn't. . . . Not—not that."

There was no trace of coquetry in her avoidance of his embrace, and nothing suggested the prude in her wide-eyed seriousness. Joe's back straightened.

"As you wish, dear."

She stood looking at him, her hands thrust into the pockets of the threadbare waterproof, her lips pursed.

"Where'll I meet you day after to-morrow?"

He suggested the corner where they had first met, but she demurred.

"Somewhere quiet," she suggested. "Where there's not so many people."

Her delicacy of mind pleased him. It set her on a plane above the servant girls and the traffic of that noisy rendezvous. They finally settled upon a quiet by-street; and there, the next night but one, as the light was failing, they met again.

Joe saw her pacing, a shadowy figure, midway between two lamps, her hands in her pockets and her shoulders rounded in that ineffable curve of fatigue and forlornness that quickened all the chivalry in his nature.

Neither spoke at the greeting, but she answered his quiet grin with a half-timid smile, and he felt her thrill as she slipped her hand inside his arm. They fell into step, making for the scene of their former evening meal, and Joe knew then that he loved her, needed her, yearned towards her,

"As clay of the pit whence we were wrought
Yearns to its fellow clay."

Specifically he put it otherwise for his own benefit when for the second time they parted, and he strode away towards the barracks.

"Joe, my lad," he muttered, his pipe-stem between his teeth, "it's you for it." And repeated the statement at intervals with such intensity as to dispose an

old lady, whom he passed on the pavement, to confide to her daughter-in-law that it was a pity to see young men give way to drink so early in the week.

The first astonished transport passed, however, Joe accepted their strange relationship with a calm unquestioning happiness. She was in so many ways a mystery to him. She had persistently refused to talk about herself, appearing content to listen to his disjointed reminiscences of "jaunties" and First Lieutenants, of war in the North Sea as he had known it, and peace in outlandish ports. And sometimes in moments of apparent absent-mindedness she would slip into the argot of the Lower Deck with a familiarity that puzzled him. She had queer little fads: policemen, for instance. She would take a side turning to avoid a policeman. Nasty sneering faces they had, she explained, and that was all about it. She disliked the more populous parts of the town, and shunned places of entertainment when in Joe's company. He, a man of quiet tastes, was nothing loath; in fact, accepted these inclinations as workings of the miracle that encompassed them. They went for long rides on trams, and on half-days jolted far out into the country on the top of a motor-omnibus.

He was conscious, although she spoke little, that his presence beside her afforded her some indefinable solace and refreshment. She never suffered a caress from him, not even allowing him to put his arm round her waist. But she had a little confiding way of putting her hand on his arm and resting her shoulder gently against him that seemed, for a long while at all events, to suffice all her need and his.

He found, however, one perplexity. He realized

after a time that he could not visualize her when they were apart. He would lie with eyes shut at night trying his hardest to make her face pass before his mental vision, but it was indefinite and shadowy, mocking him with its elusiveness. This puzzled him the more because he could remember vividly the features and expressions of numberless women—Agnes with that funny tenderness in her expression; a blunt-nosed French girl at Calais; even a squeaking, giggling little slit-eyed Japanese at Yokohama; and most vividly of all the dead officer's fiancée at the door of the mortuary. He could recall every one at will, and they mattered less to him than the ashes of a burnt-out pipe.

He tried to convey something of this perplexity to Veronica, and incomprehensively the confession seemed to afford her relief and satisfaction.

"What's it matter how I *look*?" she demanded.

"I used to think a look mattered a lot," was his reply. "There was a gell when we was buryin' that young feller I told you of—the way *she* looked. . . . She was his gell. I reckoned then that if I couldn't never have anyone look at me that way——"

He broke off, lost in the profundity of his train of thought.

"How did she look—his girl?"

He endeavoured to describe what human eyes had revealed in that moment's anguish.

"But you don't want to have me lookin' at you that way, do you?" she queried, and then there crept into her face that mulish hardening. "But maybe you will. . . ."

"Don't worry," replied Joe, with a sudden return

of light-heartedness. "I ain't goin' to die just yet!"

"You won't have to die to see it," was her enigmatic answer.

Weeks went by and slipped imperceptibly into months. Joe began to make references to a shadow that seemed to have begun to brood over his happiness. He called it the Sea-going Roster. His name must be getting near the top of the list of men awaiting their turn for sea. He had finished his course at the Gunnery School and had qualified as Seaman Gunner. He might come on for draft at any time. Veronica heard his gloomy hints in silence, tightening her hand a little on his muscular arm, drawing a shade closer to him as if his powerful frame interposed between her and all the world's evil and distress.

It came sooner even than Joe had foreseen.

A message awaited him, on his return to barracks one evening, that the Drafting Commander wished to see him the next morning. It was an unusual method of detailing a unit of a draft for sea. Joe lay awake far into the night wondering what it meant. Once before in his career he had received a similar summons to appear before the Commander of his ship, but he had been a volunteer for the attack on Zeebrugge then—one of three Able Seamen picked from a battleship's complement of a thousand men, picked for the privilege of dying on the breakwater of a Belgian seaport to make history. There was a war on then. And he hadn't found Veronica.

Enlightenment came the following morning when he faced the Drafting Commander across a paper-

littered writing-table. He heard the voice of the Commander as if in a dream. There was going to be another Naval Antarctic Expedition. The leader of it had asked for him—Joe nodded in inward confirmation of the intelligence; that's right, they were old ships, been over the bags together, you might say—provided he was a single man still and was willing to volunteer. Joe gathered that preference was being given to bachelors because they didn't want any fuss about widows and dependents afterwards, supposing . . . He quite understood. Those had always been his own views in these matters. Was he single? Oh, yes, he was single. But he'd like twenty-four hours to think it over.

He walked out into the clear sunshine of the parade ground thinking furiously. He must settle this business with Veronica outright. If she would marry him, well and good. He would give up the idea of volunteering and settle down to the humdrum life of the peace Navy without further thought of glory, counting the world well lost. And if she refused him—then that would be the end of it: the end of love and mate-hunger, of an unreal, dimly comprehended idyll. A fit and proper state of mind for a man setting out to conquer the Antarctic.

But he must know at once. It was not his turn for leave, and he had made no arrangements for meeting Veronica. But he could exchange nights ashore with a room-mate without difficulty, and with all a lover's touching faith in the intervention of Providence he had no doubt that if he searched the town long enough he would find her somewhere—even as he had found her the first night of all, guided by his star.

A fever of impatience consumed him. He was in the van of that blue-clad stream of sailormen that climbs the dreary cobbled ascent from the Naval Barracks between high cliffs of brickwork every evening after working hours, and is lost in the stagnant mass of humble dwellings beyond the Town Hall. He walked faster than his wont, level eyes scanning the roadway ahead, searching the interiors of shops where lights were beginning to throw a radiance across the roadway. He had never prayed in his life, but his faith was so unquestioning, so childlike in its assurance he would find her, that it carried him through his quest without wavering or despair. Even when the evening latened and the shops shut, after cinemas and music-halls had thinned out the pedestrians, he still roamed the streets or stood interrogatively at the corners of thoroughfares. He refused to accept defeat. Somewhere in that straggling cobweb of houses and slow-moving populace was his Veronica.

He had wandered out of his usual haunts into a quarter he had never penetrated with Veronica. It was a labyrinth of alley-ways and low-browed taverns, most of which were out of bounds to men of His Majesty's Forces—a neighbourhood that had changed little morally or materially since the press-gangs swept it with cutlass and baton to man Nelson's fleet.

Joe had paused to light a pipe when a tavern door swung open to allow a blowzy woman exit. She stood arguing on the threshold, holding the door open with her elbow, affording Joe an uninterrupted view of the smoky, garishly lit interior. In that moment his quest ended. He had found Veronica.

"'Scuse me," he said quietly to the woman.

As she swayed into the street he interposed his shoulder between the closing halves of the swing door.

For several moments Veronica did not see him. She was seated in a corner of the sawdust-carpeted lounge on the knee of a pallid-faced young Artificer, with one arm round his neck. Her face was crudely rouged and her eyelashes darkened. The pale, obstinate mouth he knew so well was stained the colour of a geranium's petals. She was staring at the row of beer-handles projecting above the bar as if some remote vision claimed her attention far beyond the hubbub of voices and the importunities of the brute that can be man.

Then slowly she turned her head and looked at Joe. She stared at him without the flicker of an eyelid, but the rouge on her cheeks slowly deepened till it stood out like two dark blotches as the blood ebbed from her face.

Joe crossed the room in three strides.

"Come out of this."

The Artificer, whose arms were about her waist, scowled valiantly.

"Here," he said, "who are you talkin' to—Master Jack Strop? This is my girl."

The clamour of voices that filled the room died to a sudden stillness. Beer mugs paused half-way to men's mouths. Cautious forms edged to the door. The shirt-sleeved, thick-necked man behind the bar raised a scarred head like a bull-terrier scenting distant combat.

"Order, please, gentlemen!" he said in a raucous, bullying tone.

A woman sniggered.

Joe stood looking down at the girl without speaking again. His normally brick-coloured face had turned grey. Veronica disengaged her arm from the neck of her cavalier and rose obediently to her feet. With a splutter of imprecation the little Artificer rose also. At the back of his scared intelligence something told him that this was an affair he'd be better out of if it were possible to do so and maintain some appearance of dignity.

"You can have her," he said. "I'd bought her, but I don't want her."

Joe turned indifferent eyes upon the speaker as if until that moment he had been unaware of his existence.

"I wasn't askin' your leave," he replied, and taking the girl by the elbow led her towards the door.

A Jewess still in her early teens, with a prematurely developed figure and vice-sharpened wits, broke the tense silence :

"She's been comin' the respectable over 'im—that's what she's been doin' of. Artful li'l' bit'th'. . . ."

The swing doors clashed to on the reeking tavern. The man and the woman were alone in the cool night under the compassionate sky.

For a moment Joe appeared at a loss. He was like a man walking in his sleep who suddenly awakes to the realization of unfamiliar surroundings. The girl's hand went up to his arm, but he shook her off and started with great strides down the uneven roadway, she following, half-walking, half-running. He heard her murmuring breathlessly at his elbow,

but paid no attention to what she said. In and out of the intricacies of that sordid quarter they went, the darkened houses throwing back the echoes of their footfalls. He was making instinctively for the familiar street where they always met, and, that reached at length, turned and faced her.

"Well?"

She was out of breath and panting. In the light of a street lamp hard by, her thin face with its dilated nostrils, lips drawn back and paint emphasizing the hollows beneath her cheek-bones, bore a dreadful resemblance to a skull.

"Well—Veronica?"

"That's not my name—my proper name. It's Sally Blunt."

"Ain't it a bit late to remember that? D'you know what I come ashore for to-night? I come ashore to ask you to marry me!"

She reeled a little and steadied herself with a hand at her side. Joe gripped her by either elbow and shook her brutally.

"To *marry* you. Understand? *Me!* Marry *you!* Now I've a mind to wring your neck."

"Go on," she gasped, as well as her chattering teeth would let her. "For God's sake go on an' do it."

He released her abruptly.

"Furs!" With a grunt he jerked the tawdry stole of dyed rabbit-skin off her shoulders. "Who give you them, I'd like to know?"

The bedizened waif of dockyard taverns stiffened into a sudden pathetic dignity.

"I earned them same's I earn my food an' lodg-

in'. You think I bin actin' dirty by you—deceivin' you an' coming the respectable? Did I ever ask you for a penny? Have I ever took a thing from you but the price of a tram-ride an' a supper? I never asked you to come along with me that first night. I'd bin shoppin'. You don't think we goes shoppin' like this, do you—buyin' food an' that? You was nice to me an' kind—the first man that hadn't acted like a beast to me since—since I could remember almost. I was tired an' feelin' almost gone, an' you spoke to me different from all the others. I was a fool—I haven't bin at it long enough not to care, I s'pose—I thought if I could jest walk out with you now'n again—'twasn't doin' you no harm. It was that or takin' to the drink. I ain't started drinkin' yet. . . . An' then I—I—kinder . . . got carin' for you. . . .” Her voice grew uncertain. “I couldn't stop seein' you——”

She broke off suddenly and her face went into her hands. Blindly she turned towards the wall of a darkened garage and leant against it, hoarse, tearless sobs shaking her narrow shoulders. She stamped her foot childishly in an effort to regain her self-control.

Joe swung round on his heel and strode off down the street.

He had gone some way when he realized he was still holding the offending fur. He stopped and considered it, thought better of the impulse to cast it into the gutter, turned and began to retrace his steps.

The girl was still there. She stood straining her eyes after him, with the light of an adjoining street

lamp full in her face. Joe had wanted a woman to look at him like that once. Well—here she was. . . . He had his wish.

She had betrayed his faith, outraged honour as he understood and clung to it, deceived him, trailed his love in the gutter; yet in that instant some dim comprehension of her pitiful motive penetrated his slow mind. He handed her back the stole.

“That putty-faced Tiffy you was with jest now said as how he’d bought you. Well, I’ll buy you instead.”

She backed away from him.

“I’d die before I let you touch me——”

Joe shook his head vehemently.

“I ain’t goin’ to. I don’t mean that. But I’m goin’ to sea for two or three years—South Pole Expedition. I shan’t need no pay. ’Tain’t much, but they reckon it’s enough to keep a good man. I’m goin’ to make out a monthly allotment. You can have pretty-well the lot. Maybe it’ll be enough to keep a—a woman—keep her from havin’ to—to earn her livin’.”

“I don’t want it! Keep it! Keep it an’ come back. I’ll earn my livin’ in a different way. ’Tain’t too late. Joe, it *ain’t* too late! I’m goin’ now. . . . Straight, I am! . . .”

“Where are you goin’?”

“You can come an’ see if you like.”

There was a desperate urgency in her hoarse voice. The Look was still in her eyes.

“Go ahead then.”

For the second time that night they set off along the deserted streets, but this time she led, stumbling,

almost running along the pavements. Joe followed her closely.

They had reached an avenue of detached houses standing back from the road among dark shrubberies. The girl paused before an iron gateway from which a short path led to the door. A dim gas-jet burned behind the fanlight.

"Good-bye," she said, hesitated and held out her hands. "Come back to me, Joe! Come back an' ask for me here when you get home again."

Joe glanced up at the darkened façade of the building. He ignored her outstretched hands.

"I don't know as I'll be comin' back," he said slowly. "But if I do—I'll come back here."

A little sound that might have been either a sob or a farewell passed her lips. She slipped through the gate like a shadow. Joe stood motionless, watching.

She knocked hesitatingly, and the door opened almost immediately. Those who waited behind it knew the value of seconds that followed a knock. The fanlight shone on a woman's grey head and a serene kindly brow.

Joe took a hurried step forward.

"'Ere!" he called. "It's all right—it's all right—I'll come back!"

The girl turned and stood looking at him. The wavering gas jet overhead illumined her face, and in her eyes for the last time Joe saw the Look. She said nothing, and for a second longer they stood thus. Then she stepped across the threshold.

Joe remained motionless, staring at the closed door in the certitude of the Fate awaiting him.

XI

A MAN IN THE MAKING

I

HE was one of those reddish creatures; red hair, brown eyes that looked as if they had sparks in them, and a profusion of freckles about his nose and cheekbones. Hair and eyes were an inheritance from his mother, whose grandmother lived in one of those damp, mysterious-looking palaces reflected in great numbers in the canals of Venice. The freckles he got from his father, who was pure Celtic Scots and named him Euan. Euan Raphael McNeil to give you the whole thing, but his mother called him "Raffy."

At the time he was appointed to his first sea-going ship he stood perhaps 5 feet 4 inches, but mere inches or lack of them is no criterion when one suddenly finds oneself a full-fledged midshipman. Moreover, he had been appointed to the new Flagship of the China Squadron, and was due to leave England in a few days' time. Also, he had a dirk. . . .

No, decidedly inches did not matter.

His mother and father accompanied him to Portsmouth on the eve of the day he was to join his ship. Euan was inclined to protest at this as having a flavour of "wet-nursing" about it. However, his mother explained that China was very far away and two years

was a long, long time when you looked at it from this end. Incidentally, he was their only son.

They stayed at an old-fashioned hotel near the dockyard gates. The windows looked out across the Hard at the *Victory* swinging to the tide, and the red-brown roofs and gables of Gosport. Submarines and destroyers passed in and out all day, and just as they were sitting down to dinner a mammoth battleship glided majestically up-harbour from the mysterious outer sea. The air smelt of salt and seaweed, and nearly every passer-by was a bluejacket or marine. But no one in the hotel seemed to notice these things; and Euan, eating boiled mutton and caper sauce in the bow window of the coffee-room with its air of shabby, dignified antiquity, realized that little round him had changed since Nelson stepped down from the adjacent sally-port to his waiting gig to embark in that same *Victory* for the last time, and Tom Cringle and his friends ruffled into that very coffee-room and called for spiced brandy-and-water. . . .

Both his mother and father sat on his bed after he had undressed and turned in. They all kept up a kind of forced joviality and even indulged in a mild sort of pillow fight; but after Euan's mother had kissed him good night and gone to her own room his father sat on, twisting his empty pipe slowly round in his strong hands, staring through the open windows at the lights across the harbour.

"You're sixteen, Euan," he said presently. "The next two years are the ones that matter most in all your life. When you are quite an old man"—a smile lurked beneath his bristly, ginger moustache—"as old as I am even, you will find that these next two years

are the holding-ground for your soul's anchor." He chewed his pipe-stem. "This ain't going to be a pi-jaw. I've told you already all you need to know—all there is to know. You know about women, Euan, and all that. There's only one way to keep a clean mind, and that's to sweat good and hearty every day and turn in dog tired. . ." He rose and stood looking down at his son with grim wistfulness. "Go on believing in the things mother taught you. Don't get too jolly manly to say your prayers; and write home once a week." He turned and strode to the door. "Come back a man. Good night."

They walked with him to the dockyard gate the following morning. Euan would have preferred to perform the short journey unaccompanied, but he wore his uniform and dirk, and his mother pleaded to be allowed to walk beside him thus arrayed. What could he do but humour her, with China sixteen thousand miles away and the impending two years' commission stretching away into infinity? The policeman at the gate looked down at him from his immense height and replied to Euan's query as to his ship's whereabouts with a jerk of his strapped chin. "'Longside the Farewell Jetty. First opening on your left and keep straight through."

Euan glanced at his mother and father. He had a curious feeling he mentally described to himself as "bowelly." His inside seemed to be composed entirely of some restless unstable fluid. He fingered his dirk hilt as if in search of comfort. The surface was a pale-coloured, pebbly substance his mother called shagreen and his father said was sharkskin—

a material (according to his father) favoured for the manufacture of sword hilts because it did not grow slippery with blood. . . .

Its contact with his fingers heartened him. The impulse to throw his arms round his mother's neck passed as swiftly as it came. He grinned at his father, who was looking at him with a kind of critical anxiety.

"So long, old cock," said his father. "We'll look out for you about tea-time if they'll let you come ashore."

"Right-ho!" replied Euan. He avoided his mother's eye, and, turning, set off in the direction indicated by the policeman.

His mother and father, who lacked the fortifying influence of brass buttons, dirk and patches, stood staring after him till he vanished from sight behind a pile of rusty buoys.

His mother gave a sort of gulp. "Why *did* we do it? Oh, why——"

Her husband pressed her arm as they retraced their steps. "Because he's all we've got. All we prize and love and value in the world. He's good stuff, Nina, though I say it what shouldn't. He's worthy of the Empire. And now, so are we."

2

That first day on board remained for all time a tangle of blurred impressions, few of which ever succeeded in detaching themselves into separate distinct memories.

Euan was greeted at the gangway by the Midship-

man of the Watch, a saturnine youth a couple of years his senior, who adjured him in a swift whisper to flee while there was yet time; the assurance that the Commander was a cannibal and that the Sub was frequently tried by court-martial for manslaughter of junior midshipmen did little to give him self-confidence as he stood forlornly on the vast quarter-deck and awaited recognition by an Olympian Lieutenant. This dignitary, who carried a telescope under his arm and wore a sword-belt round a wasp-like frock-coated waist, eyed him coldly through a monocle, and said in a tone of complete mental and physical exhaustion: "Carry on."

Under the guidance of the Midshipman of the Watch (who Euan decided had the largest feet and ears and the tightest trousers of any mortal he had ever seen) he was conducted forward to the Commander's cabin. The breakfast hour was still in progress, and the batteries were crowded with men sitting about and smoking. A diminutive Marine bugler with a countenance of serene childish purity strutted past and eyed Euan superciliously. As Euan's guide paused before a curtained doorway in the superstructure a stout Petty Officer Quartermaster stepped into his line of vision, addressing the Marine bugler: "If I 'ears you usin' that hawful langwidge again . . ." was wafted to the ears of the shocked new-comer.

Euan felt himself propelled by a hand on his elbow into the doorway, and left there in full view of a big man with a curly beard in the act of lighting a pipe. He wore the uniform of a Commander. His cabin was littered with half-unpacked trunks and suit-cases,

golf clubs, guns and fishing rods. Photographs and dog biscuits strewed the chairs and bunk, a red setter lay with her nose on her paws, one eye open on the doorway.

"Come aboard to join, sir," said Euan. Somehow the sight of all this confusion filled him with a feeling of compassion for the man with the curly beard, whose head by this time was almost completely enveloped in tobacco smoke.

"Good Lord!" groaned an extraordinarily deep voice. "Another!" A big brown hand was extended to him. A pair of inflammable, very blue eyes were covering him from head to foot with a faintly amused gleam.

"What's your name?"

"McNeil, sir."

Euan shook hands, and as he did so something conveyed the impression to him that nothing could ever perturb this big man; that all he asked of life was adventure and hard work; that fear was a sensation he had yet to experience; that you could lie to those blue eyes with as much hope of success as you could plunge your hand unscathed into molten iron. . . .

"I'm a new boy, too," said the profound bass voice. "None of us enjoy being that. Cut along to the Gunroom and shake down. First ship?"

"Yessir!" said Euan, stiff as a ramrod and in the manliest of voices.

"Well, all your troubles are in front of you; that's the best place to keep 'em." He turned to a desk heaped with note-books and papers and unopened letters. "You'd better sling your hammock to-day."

Emerging from the cabin Euan encountered the

Midshipman of the Watch, who conducted him down a metal ladder on to the dimly-lighted main deck.

Kaleidoscopic impressions whirled through Euan's brain—vistas of men, bearded and clean-shaven, bare-footed and otherwise, crowding narrow decks and passages. They passed to and fro on mysterious errands without jostling, worked at incomprehensible tasks with a curious self-containment as if they moved each enclosed in an invisible envelope of his own personality. There were hundreds of men; hundreds and hundreds of them; there was an odour between decks of wet paint, cooked food, much-slept-in blankets, tarred rope, caustic soda and scrubbed woodwork all infinitely faint and intermingled. In years to come that smell was destined to greet him after a prolonged spell of leave like a joyous embrace, so that he would half-shut his eyes and sniff deep and smack his lips with a grateful "Ah . . . !" It is the smell of a man-of-war, different to all other odours in the world, hateful or exquisite, "all according," as they say.

Lights burned dimly behind thick globes along the bulkhead. Rifle barrels in racks between the lights caught successive gleams in dull reflection; cutlass hilts spread fan-wise overhead; against a white-enamelled casing stood a row of midshipmen's sea-chests each with the owner's name on a brass plate. As he passed them one caught his eye :

EUAN R. McNEIL,
Royal Navy.

Up to that moment he had had the sensation of being whirled along by some swift, irresistible and

utterly indifferent force. But the sight of his own name—his peculiar intimate possession—standing there like a rock in a cataract, steadied him. He clutched at a lost individuality. "This is ME," he said. In the midst of all this unfamiliarity, this busy ship-life seething all round him, he was aware of himself, a small, frightened figure, gripping the hilt of his dirk, utterly insignificant, but master of his soul.

He found himself in the Gunroom without a very clear idea how he got there. It was a long, narrow space lit by scuttles in the ship's side and occupied almost entirely by a table; a settee ran round it upholstered in American-cloth, and at one end, where a trap-hatch connected with the pantry, a Chinese steward and a couple of marine servants were removing the debris of breakfast.

A Sub-Lieutenant sat at the end of the table smoking over the morning paper. His hair was fair, almost golden, and of a rather effeminate curliness. His face from brow to mouth was singularly beautiful, like a saint in a stained-glass window, but at the mouth all beauty ceased; it was a cruel mouth with thin, very red lips. He glanced at Euan indifferently and continued his perusal of the paper.

Euan looked round the mess—the proportions were those of a good-sized tram-car—and at the other end found five midshipmen, all of his own term, seated in a row with their backs to the ship's side whispering furtively among themselves. At the sight of him their faces brightened. They grinned and made room for him in their midst, murmuring inquiries and comment under their breaths. A little

apart sat a newly joined Assistant Clerk. He had no friends; a small, rather fat, pale-faced youth with eyes the colour of gooseberries, and not over-clean linen. Euan took comfort from the sight of this forlorn creature. The new midshipmen, at all events, had a common training at the Naval College and in the Training Cruiser. Naval tradition and comradeship carried them a long way into this unfamiliar world of the sea-going Navy. But here was a mere schoolboy, suddenly clothed in blue cloth and brass buttons and translated without further preliminary into the midst of it.

"He was a Blue-coat School boy," whispered one of Euan's companions, indicating the forlorn figure. "I travelled down with him." Euan felt an immeasurable superiority to all schoolboys, and this one in particular, who had neither dirk nor patches but only a thin line of white round his cuff.

The mess filled and emptied; older midshipmen came and went; another Sub, a broad-shouldered, athletic-looking figure, came in and began a conversation with the first Sub. It appeared to refer to some mutual acquaintance of the fair sex. Suddenly he glanced round at the whispering novitiates and roared:

"BREADCRUMBS, you warts!"

Some echo of past teaching in the Cruiser prompted Euan. He thrust his fingers into his ears, and the remainder followed suit sheepishly. The Assistant Clerk sat motionless, staring with his unblinking gooseberry eyes at the two Subs.

"Come here," said the brawny Sub. The Clerk obeyed. He had the appearance of a fat little

guinea-pig. "Unhappy youth," said the Sub, "you will never know how near you are to death. What I have to say to this officer and gentleman," he nodded at the other Sub, "is not for tender ears. Become instantly as one having ears that heareth not."

The Clerk put his fingers in his ears, and the Subs continued their conversation. "All right," said one presently, not looking up or changing his tone. "Take your beastly little fingers out of your ears."

The Assistant Clerk briskly obeyed, but the six midshipmen continued to sit deaf and motionless.

"For that," said the Sub with the cruel mouth, "you shall receive six of the best in due course."

"My nose was itching," said the Clerk. "I only——"

"Silence, you little hog. You've no business to have a nose. I shall make it a dozen."

"What's all this about dozens?" inquired a pleasant tenor voice in the doorway. A tall, cadaverous figure with rimless pince-nez of great thickness and untidy hair entered the mess. He wore the single gold and white stripe of an Assistant Paymaster.

"Your underling requires chastisement, Harvey," said the Sub.

"Does he?" observed the A. P. languidly. "Then my hand and mine alone administers it." He took the little Clerk lightly by the ear and led him to the doorway. "In the meanwhile he and I will commune awhile apart on the mysteries of ledgers,

victualling accounts, and the ship's steward's breath which smells of rum."

The morning passed with the timeless bewildering swiftness of all unfamiliar experiences. The Senior Midshipman appeared in the mess about ten o'clock with a watch and station bill. He was blunt-nosed, merry-eyed, and had an air of being bowed beneath vast responsibilities. He took in the six new-comers at a glance and flung down the watch bill on the table.

The older midshipmen to the number of seven or eight crowded round to learn the allocation of their new duties. They had all come on to this ship, *en bloc*, from a paid-off Battleship in the Channel Fleet, and appeared on terms of noisy, friendly intimacy with each other. They all ignored the six "warts," but Euan thought one or two appeared rather self-conscious after some sally of wit or outrageous remark, as if appreciatively aware of a breathless and wide-eyed audience. They were all a year or so the senior of the newly joined; their monkey-jackets were shiny about the elbows and gaping in the seam here and there, the white midshipmen's patches soiled with grime, and the bottoms of their trousers, which most had outgrown, fringed with "whiskers." They appeared to take pride in the uncouthness of their appearances and to regard the rents of their garments as the scars of honourable internecine warfare. They filled the mess with their babble as they crowded round the watch bill, arguing, expostulating, and chaffing at the tops of their voices.

"Bags I the steam-puncher. . . . No, the whaler's a cow of a boat. Why shouldn't one of the

warts——” “Golly! Four watches at sea all the way out to Hong Kong. That’s utter tosh!” “Who’s Lieutenant of my Division?” “No, I’m hanged if I do Tankie¹ any more.” “Is the Admiral going to have a doggie?”² “I won’t keep watch with that ass.” “Who’s going to write up the leave-book?”

“Oh, *dry* up all of you,” protested the Senior Midshipman, round whom they clustered, arms encircling necks and shoulders like swarming bees round their queen. He flung himself free. “*I’m* going to have the Picket Boat and I’m doing Tankie. That’s all about it. Now then for the warts.”

The new midshipmen found themselves told off for duties under the supervision of their seniors. Euan was informed that he was junior midshipman of the quarter-deck division, midshipman of the launch, midshipman of the after upper deck 6-in. casemate gun, and the following forenoon watch. All these onerous responsibilities awaited him under the chaperonage of a senior, a hazel-eyed, lean-limbed youth called Lascelles.

Lascelles it was who took him under his wing and led him to his sea-chest. Euan unlocked it, flung open the lid, and, obeying some vague homing impulse, sat down in its shelter. It was by no means privacy, for the chests stood all of a row in a thoroughfare leading from the Marine mess-deck. But it contained all his worldly possessions, and inside the heavy lid the photographs of his mother and father, home and dogs; it was the shrine of his

¹ Assistant to Navigating Officer.

² Aide-de-camp.

private life—that part with which the Navy had nothing to do. Here Lascelles, with his instinct for divining others' feelings that Euan was to know so well in time, planted him to get his breath.

His servant, whose services he shared with two others, was a mountainous Marine Artilleryman with a badly damaged nose and a habit of breathing through it stertorously, which added to his air of being on the point of falling asleep where he stood. With the aid of this worthy Euan chose a slinging billet for his hammock, two hooks in the beams overhead at the foot of a hatchway leading to the upper deck. The air blew down fresh, and at times the rain and spray of heavy seas; the traffic on the hatchway bumped his hammock as he slept; but all these things fell into their places in time and became so inseparably a part of his life that when the commission ended and he returned home the hush and seclusion of his bedroom oppressed him with an overwhelming loneliness, so that he would wake at nights straining his ears in the silence, to hear only the heavy beating of his own heart. . . .

In the afternoon the newly joined midshipmen were given leave to go ashore—those who had friends to go to—until 10 p.m. Euan found his mother and father awaiting him in their private sitting-room at the hotel. He felt as if an immense period of time separated that moment from their parting at the dock-yard gates. Already the Service had set its mark upon his forehead; the hotel and streets had suddenly become alien territory, and even his mother and father seemed to have receded a little. . . . Eight hours only had elapsed since he joined his first ship,

but although he did not know it, his heart had already started building up round itself that instinctive callosity which is the defence and refuge of all hearts destined to a lifetime of partings.

3

The sea road to Hong Kong is a long road, and the milestones on it for outward-bound men-of-war are Gibraltar, Malta, Port Said, Colombo, and Singapore. In his official letter of proceedings the Captain described the ship's passage out as uneventful. Perhaps it was from his point of view. But to Euan the picture-book of life was suddenly flung open for the first time, presenting to his delighted eyes a medley of blazing colours, a bewilderment of new faces and new scenes barely impressed upon the retina before the page turned to yield another. Gibraltar, in the hot Northern African sunlight, with its little pink and lemon-coloured houses drowsing under the frown of the heights, drowsing over things immemorial—chain-shot and fireships, sieges and the flutter of Moorish pennons. . . . Euan landed there alone to explore the narrow, noisy streets and buy his father a present of a box of cigars. These he purchased ridiculously cheap from a young woman with a flower in her glossy black hair; she was the only occupant of the dim, cool, pungent-smelling little shop, that clung like a swallow's nest to the steep foot of the Rock. She handed him his purchase, murmured something in Spanish, and, leaning forward out of the shadows, kissed him lightly on the cheek.

In after years he tried to find the shop again, but he never succeeded, which is perhaps just as well; for the rest of his life, however, that first light brush from the fluttering wing-tips of Romance and the frowning fortress of Gibraltar remained inseparable in his memory.

Then came Malta, where they found the Mediterranean Fleet at its buoys in the Grand Harbour. They played the Flagship's Gunroom at hockey before breakfast on the sun-baked mud Corridino, and at cricket in the afternoon on an equally sun-baked Marsa. The Junior Officers Club extended its hospitality to these birds of passage, and Euan drank shandy-gaff in a stone-flagged bar crowded by noisy flannel-garbed Gunroom Officers, and presided over by a one-eyed Maltese of unutterably villainous aspect. He appeared to know every midshipman in the Squadron (and it was a large one in those days) by name and to carry their reckonings in his head. They in their turn heaped indiscriminate abuse upon him, but with a kind of affectionate proprietorship in their tones; as, indeed, might the members of any club boasting a steward credited by popular tradition with having slain his own brother with a cunning knife jab. For one glass of Marsala he was always willing to demonstrate in pantomime the subtlety of the upward twisted thrust that had proved so efficacious. . . .

That to Euan was Malta; Malta of the incalculable churches and their ever-jangling bells, the mouldering palaces, scavenging goats, catacombs and hooded women; harbourer of that shipwrecked mariner of old, St. Paul the Apostle.

Port Said is the beginning of the East, and when Euan made its acquaintance for the first time it was trying to maintain a waning reputation for being the wickedest place in the world. This reputation was whispered to Euan by a junior midshipman whose brother was in the Egyptian army. He did not specify the nature of the wickedness that set Port Said apart from all the cities of the world, but Euan experienced a distinct thrill of curiosity and excitement when he landed and felt the sand of the Wickedest Place in the World under his feet. He looked about, expectant of nameless evil. It was dirty and dusty, hot and swarming with flies. Arabs and Levantines importuned him on all sides to buy trashy "curios"; scabrous beggars whined for charity; little wicked-looking boys showed their white teeth in impish grins beneath their fezes—but for the rest he might have spent the afternoon in a cathedral close, and on reaching the jetty to embark in the boat again, for the first and last time in the course of his Naval career, he was tendered a tract by a severe-looking lady in a grey alpaca dress, and, to complete the anti-climax, elastic-sided boots.

Colombo came like an oasis after the breathless heat of the Red Sea. Here Euan made his first acquaintance with the rickshaw and experienced that pompously exalted condition of the mind peculiar to those who find themselves seated at ease and being propelled by the sole agency of a sweating fellow-human. The Galle Face Hotel, with its punkahs and cool drinks, swimming bath and curries of a thousand spiced ingredients, sent him back to his ship gorged, and penniless till next pay day. But

in after years he never saw a sailor ashore plunged in reckless carousal or return on board with bloodshot eye and haggard countenance, the reek of drink upon him, without a quick thrill of sympathetic comprehension; if it taught him nothing more the money was not ill-spent.

The long, hot trip through the Red Sea and Indian Ocean gave Euan time to sort out his impressions, and, to use a Naval idiom, shake down. He got to know the Officers by sight and name, and most of the men in his division. He breakfasted, in company with another "wart," as the guest of the Admiral and was regaled with undreamed-of delicacies. It was Euan's first introduction to an Admiral at close quarters, and he experienced a faint surprise at discovering that he ate his food just like an ordinary mortal and talked with grave interested friendliness to both frightened boys. He was a tall, bony, grey-bearded man with craggy eyebrows, rather bowed about the shoulders as if the arduous years of long foreign commissions had wearied him into a premature acceptance of old age. He was a Knight in the Companionship of three great Orders and a baronet; a bachelor and (so said the coxswain) a woman-hater. The Flag Captain was a less awesome figure. When he spoke it was as if he were restraining himself with difficulty from a habit, learned young, of conveying orders through a gale at sea. Lean and dark he was, saturnine almost, with an expressive mobile face and a mannerism of brushing the tip of his nose with his forefinger when he was amused. The Secretary and Flag Lieutenant shared the meal. The former appeared to suffer from

chronic dyspepsia and ate slowly in silence as if pre-occupied with unheard voices. The Flag Lieutenant, who turned out early and did physical drill with the midshipmen, glowed with health and vitality. His was a merry soul, without affectation or "side," and once or twice Euan saw the Admiral's regard pass over him with a kind of wistful paternal affection. . . .

So much for the "Cuddy." The Wardroom was a big one, and it was a long time before Euan learned to know them all. He did in time, of course, with that intense startling insight into their characters and dispositions which the Gunroom always possessed about the Wardroom, and which the latter accepts without emotion.

There was "Wanky Willy," the First Lieutenant who sometimes drank rather more port than was good for him—anyhow, when there was an "occasion" in the mess; and when there wasn't he invented one. There was the old Major of Marines who had fought in the Soudan and was apt to find the fact difficult to keep out of conversation. His Subaltern, a brilliant linguist and mathematician, possessed the type of good looks dear to both men and women—a sort of whimsical, reckless, unconscious charm of countenance, marred a little perhaps by that ineradicable crease running down from each nostril which is the result of lore acquired more easily in continental capitals than the language of the country.

The Fleet Surgeon was an ex-Rugby international and amateur heavy-weight, with a treacherous knee-joint and a broken nose, and, incidentally, a heart (it was rumoured) some woman had helped to share the

fate of his nose. It was before the era of the married Naval Officer and in a Wardroom boasting upwards of twenty-five members, the Engineer Commander was the only married man. It set him apart from the remainder of the mess, a figure of envy to some, compassion to others. He was a bearded, silent, conscientious officer, who, when not below among his engines or in the office, seemed to spend most of his spare time in his cabin writing to his wife. Another who shared this troglodyte tendency was the Paymaster. But he, when the last entry in his cash account was made and his day's work done, would softly close his cabin door. Then from a shelf overhead he lifted an old brown violin from its case, snuggled it lovingly under his chin and seated cross-legged on his bunk, drew from the muted strings a thin stream of tender melody that carried his soul into some realm of enchantment all its own, where the chink of coin and the scratching of a pen on paper ruled vertically with faint red lines must have sounded, if he heard them at all, very far away.

There were the "specialist" officers too: the Navigating Commander in whose anatomy steel wire took the place of nerves and whose fund of irreproducible anecdote was unequalled in the Navy. It was at the time of the great *renaissance* of Naval Gunnery, and the wave of sombre enthusiasm that swept through the whole Navy and was destined to break in triumph off the shores of Jutland carried on its young crest the Gunnery Lieutenant. He was deemed a visionary in those days, prophet of an untried creed, that of overwhelming a target with an

accurately synchronized broadside. . . . His enthusiasm devoured him like a flame. He read Gunnery, talked Gunnery, dreamed Gunnery. And the gods of war must have loved him for it, because when, ten years later, they called him to his Watch Below, he went ungrudgingly, with the roar of the British guns in his ears, conscious that his life's work had not been in vain.

Eager-eyed, slim-wristed, long of limb and finger, the Torpedo Lieutenant united the small features and delicately cut mouth of a woman with an almost desperate physical courage. In all after-dinner horse-play, in every emergency or test of endurance, he was foremost amongst the Wardroom hot-heads. Him, too, the Red Gods grew to love over well in time; but that story belongs to the category of "War stuff," which nobody wants to read nowadays.

There were four watch-keeping Lieutenants and two Engineer Lieutenants. Of the latter one loved beer over well, which in a tropical climate is taking on big odds. He was a martyr to prickly heat and painted engagingly in water colours. The other gave no outward manifestation of loving anything or anybody. A silent, introspective man with leanings towards Socialism and Political Economy in leisure moments. Down below in the hell glare of the furnaces and among the sobbing racket of main and auxiliary machinery he was a relentless slave-driver and not beloved of his men.

One watch-keeper has been described already. Of the other three one was short and dark, passionately addicted to horses, with an inexplicable preference for caps a size too small for him, which he wore with the

peak tilted well over his right eye. The other two were the Damon and Pythias of the mess—only recently promoted to Lieutenants and once in the same term. The senior had sandy eyelashes and a nose like a button—boxing enthusiast and devotee of physical training. The other was chiefly remarkable for the bloodless pallor of his face and absolutely perfect teeth.

I have been at some pains to sketch in crude outline the Wardroom, rather than the Gunroom, in this endeavour to trace the development of Euan's character on the road to manhood, because the eyes of boyhood are fixed, not on his contemporaries or his environment, but on those who are on the higher rungs of the ladder. These he strives to ape and emulate. A composite impression of them all was the mould into which Euan ardently pressed the plastic material of his own personality. The result ere it attained "the full stature of its perfection" was what you can imagine. Unsightly and useless protuberances here and there, idle tricks, vain beliefs, a whole lot of superfluities adhered to what was in the main a manly, courageous, wholesome model. And this is where his environment played its peculiar part. In the Argus-eyed, unimpassioned criticism of contemporaries, the ceaseless friction of the day's work and routine, the standards of tradition and caste ever passing over him, all excrescences were worn away in time. And what remained the mallet and chisel of Naval Discipline dealt with ruthlessly and well.

From Singapore to the sunrise may be said to lie the Far East. It has a peculiar quality of its own that has been described as glamour; but the word has not yet been coined that combines all its witchery, its brutal rawness, and its infinite seduction. No man, however world-seasoned, however unresponsive to "atmosphere," has been there without acknowledging its spell; or has not left it infinitely wiser, and sometimes very much sadder, than when he went there.

Naval routine swung through its daily orbit on board the Flagship of the China Squadron, along much the same lines that it followed in the Channel Fleet, in the Mediterranean, East Indies or the Cape of Good Hope Squadrons; and this alone, in the midst of Oriental languor, the loves, intrigues, and passions of the incomprehensible East, preserved for Euan that link with his boyhood from which the rest might have weaned him too fast for his soul's good.

At 6.15 A.M. daily he tumbled out of his hammock; tousled-haired and sleepy-eyed he pulled on flannel trousers and vest, and in company with a dozen other similarly tousled-haired young gentlemen proceeded to perform on the quarter-deck a series of breathless contortions known colloquially as "physics." They were conducted in the shade of the awning by the junior watch-keeper, whose thews were his religion and who delighted in a man's legs above all the rest of the wonderful works of God.

"First position! Arms ra-a-a-ise! Knees be-e-e-end. Arms stretching—One! . . . Two!

One! . . . Two! That's the style! More ginger!
One! Two! Knees stre-e-etch. . . ."

And so on, while all round them the indifferent, unchanging East smiled drowsily at another morn and a couple of miles away, amid a jumble of curly, dragon-crested roofs that lifted their gables above the battlements of a Chinese walled city, an opium-sodden Taoti pointed a shaking finger and sent a wretch cowering in chains before him to torture and death.

Physics ended, ensued a helter-skelter stampede to the bath-room. In an apartment whose available floor space measured perhaps fourteen feet by ten, a dozen nude sweating figures splashed in circular tin baths, shaved, squabbled, sang and brushed their teeth in noisy cameraderie. Then came breakfast. Ashore in these climes "whisky-stinger" is the favoured breakfast amongst those whom the morning finds shouldering for another day the White Man's burden. But the Navy does not drink before the sun is "over the foreyard," whether it finds itself on the equator or in the proximity of either Pole. Breakfast in the Gunroom included porridge, eggs-and-bacon, and marmalade, as inevitably as the White Ensign was hoisted at 8 A.M. Euan, as befitted his humble status in the mess, was responsible that the cock-roaches, which swarmed darkly about the bulkhead and overhead beams, did not invade the Subs' coffee or their plates.

At 9 A.M. the Ship's Company was mustered at Divisions on the upper deck, and when Euan had called out each man's name in the quarter-deck division (it was six months before he could do it

from memory) and the Lieutenant of his division had inspected them (Euan at his elbow with pencil and note-book), the band struck up "Life on the Ocean Wave," and the Ship's Company marched aft to prayers. The Chaplain, who was also Naval Instructor, read prayers; they always concluded with the one set apart for the Navy's especial use, in which the sailorman pathetically intercedes with the Omnipotent to be allowed to "return in safety to enjoy the blessings of the land." Truly a sailor's prayer.

Then the midshipmen, herded by their senior as a sheep-dog worries a flock through a narrow gap, assembled in the school-place. It was only a varnished deal table on the aft deck with forms on either side, enclosed by a canvas screen. But here they wrestled daily until noon with the theory of navigation and spherical trigonometry, physics and dynamics and the peculiarities of forces acting along an inclined plane.

The Padre, to whom they yielded a grudging sort of submission during these sweltering hours, understood to a nicety the temper of the very mixed team he drove, not without success, along the uphill road to knowledge. Undiluted higher mathematics is apt to give mental indigestion to its victims in time; there were mornings when after a cursory glance round the table at the moist vacant faces and wandering eyes, the Padre would sweep a duster over the blackboard with a gesture of finality. Then sitting down on a corner of the table, with one leg swinging and the chalk twisting in his dusty fingers, he would talk to them of other things. Chinese philosophy, or the pyramids, the theory of music, gyroscopes or bees—

it was always a fresh subject, always absorbingly interesting. They never knew the hours of leisure he devoted to reading up these topics, and never did he impart the fruits of his labour with the air of being wiser than his hearers or of reckoning all this patiently acquired knowledge unto himself for righteousness. A bristly-bearded, spectacled little man with a rather high tenor voice and a manner that managed to combine humility and firmness. Euan learned more from him than he realized till long afterwards. He grew fond of him, as indeed they all were, with a half-contemptuous, hypercritical affection. But when the commission came to an end and they all returned to the fulfilment of their daily prayer he never saw or heard of the little Padre again.

Dinner came at noon and after that until 1.10 P.M.—or 3.30 P.M. in the hottest parts of the station—the hour was sacred to the individual throughout the ship. All routine was in suspension, and the Gun-room betook itself to the shade of the after sponson or shelter-deck, where it sprawled, smoked, read or dozed and none harried so much (or so little) as a junior midshipman. When, an hour later, the brisk notes of the bugle shattered the universal lethargy of the ship, relentlessly jerking to their feet both officers and men, there was more instruction for the midshipmen. This time it was of a less theoretical nature—"stripping" down the breech of a 6-inch gun; racing, foremast against mainmast, hoists of manœuvring signals to the masthead; ship construction with the Carpenter, when they crawled and sweated in the double-bottoms committing to memory the where-

abouts of fresh-water tanks and manholes, water-tight doors and transverse frames. Under the guidance of the old Boatswain (who boasted the frayed medal ribbon of the Zulu War and claimed to be the last man in the Navy to wear it) they brushed up such knowledge of cable work as the amazingly complete working model at Dartmouth had given them. With the Torpedo Lieutenant they stood in a semi-circle round the dynamo, mesmerized by the drone of its revolving armatures, and learned how a ship is lit and ventilated. In sweat-darkened overalls they "rove steam" with the assistance of one of the Engineer Lieutenants and stoked, or took to pieces some piece of auxiliary machinery undergoing repair. It was a catholic syllabus, leaving much to the individual whether he listened and learned, using his eyes and intelligence, or whether he lazed and kept in the rear of the class, thinking of other things. The crammer-bred came off second best in these hours of free and easy instruction. They had been accustomed to sit passive and neutral while unrelated facts were forced into their memories and the lid squeezed down on top of everything till examination day. But Euan had mercifully never experienced the system, and had sufficient imagination to realize that now was the time or never to absorb the practical A B C of his life's profession. He had a retentive memory and a bent for things mechanical, which are but mathematical after all, in a congealed form. He was easily first of his term in the annual midshipmen's examination held in the Fleet, and in due course received from his father two crisp five-pound notes—one to buy something useful with and the other to

"buy sweets with," according to parental injunctions. Euan spent it in having a curly red and blue dragon tattooed on his skinny left arm.

5

Mention has already been made of Lascelles. He was a senior midshipman, and for the first six months of the commission Euan kept watch under his tutelage, occupying much the same relation to him as a fag does to a sixth-form boy at school. It was Lascelles who initiated him into intricacies of the routine board, a printed time-table hanging outside the Commander's cabin, that regulated the work of the hands from hour to hour throughout the working day. Upon the midshipman of the watch rested the responsibility of seeing that the lives of close on a thousand men moved in accordance with this schedule, each change being duly reported to the Officer of the Watch (who yawned and said, "Carry on"), and was conveyed to the rest of the ship-world by the pipe and bawl of the boatswain's mate or the strident note of the bugle. In this way Euan learned the delicate adjustment of the vast human machine around him that was never entirely at rest, and how lack of foresight or a single moment of forgetfulness could plunge the upper deck in chaos or send a boat's crew dinnerless.

He was entrusted with writing up the deck-log, in which is recorded the humdrum events of daily life on board ship, the state of the weather, the vagaries of the barometer and the temperature of the sea. He was expected to be a mine of information on these

subjects, and to answer without hesitation when asked: "What the glass was doing?" or the direction of the wind. Without knowing it he developed in this way the mysterious sixth sense of the seaman, who is affected more by the fall of the barometer, as a general rule, than the eclipse of a dynasty. He learned other things from Lascelles: the art of brewing cocoa in the charthouse during the middle watch; the names of stars and planets and how to find them in the glowing confusion of the tropic night sky; the dodges whereby a skulker can avoid mustering with the watch; the quickest and surest way to reach the seaboard first at the sudden pipe: "Away seaboard's crew!" that sent fifteen men in a rush to the cutter at the davits once in each watch at sea. He shared many vigils with Lascelles; humid middle watches in the Malay Archipelago, when there was little to do and they talked (would that I could tell you half the things those boyish hearts revealed and shared) to keep themselves awake. "Pannicky" forenoon watches in Hong Kong harbour, when there was a coming and going of Post Captains in their galleys and much piping of the side. Cold grey morning watches off the coast of Tartary; long (Lord, how long!) afternoons off Woosung under the quarter-deck awning, with the quarter-deckmen rubbing drowsily at brightwork, and the glare from the water dancing in reflection on the burnished muzzles of the barbette guns.

Lascelles, whose time for passing for Sub-Lieutenant was drawing near, imparted to his satellite during these hours the sum of nearly three crowded years' experience of midshipman life. It goes with-

out saying that much went in at one of Euan's small ears and came out at the other. He had to learn, as Lascelles had learned most of his lesson, by bitter experience, and not a little was the fruit of physical pain. The Lieutenant of his watch suffered no fool gladly, and before Euan had been a month on board, handed him his signet ring in the course of a hectic forenoon watch and bade him take it to the Sub. That officer rose lazily from the only arm-chair the mess boasted, put the ring in his pocket and selected a flexible rattan cane from the rack.

"You've been making a fool of yourself on watch?"

Euan reddened. "I forgot to call away the picket boat to bring off the Commander."

"Quite so. Smell the spot."

There was no spot to smell in actual reality, but the invitation held good nevertheless. Euan knelt on the settee with his nose flattened against the surface of the table, in an attitude undignified but eminently appropriate to the business in hand.

The Sub stepped back a pace, measured his surroundings with the rattan to ensure a free swing, and passed the tip of his tongue over his thin lips. . . . "Tighter than that. . . ."

The ensuing fifteen seconds passed more slowly and painfully than any period of time Euan remembered in his brief existence.

". . . Right you are; get back on watch and give 'Tin Eye' back his ring." The executioner rang the bell and ordered a cocktail. Lascelles grinned sympathetically when Euan reappeared, rather white,

with a queer hiccupy desire to sob somewhere in his throat.

"How many did he give you?"

"Six."

"That's nothing. When I was a wart I had to turn out and take a dozen and a half in my pyjamas from the Sub to amuse one of his guests after dinner. 'Sides, you deserved it. 'Tin Eye' got cursed to blazes by the Commander."

6

Euan worked his way upwards from the Captaincy of the Whaler (that "cow of a boat" under sail) to the wheel of one of the picket boats, and it took him fifteen months to get there. He learned in the process pretty well all there was to know about service boat sailing, and the boy who knows that by eighteen has travelled a long way. He grew accustomed to backing a whaler in through a wicked surf, groping along tortuous channels with lead-line and luck alone to guide him into an unknown harbour. He knew what it was to bring off a launch load of uproarious liberty-men under sail, and once at Shan-hi-Kwan (where the great wall of China runs down to the coast) he brought off a shooting party in the teeth of a rising Pacific gale, nursing his cutter five miles to windward to reach the ship.

He did not know that these arduous months were designed to give him self-confidence and a power of command. He did not know that Olympian eyes were upon him most of the time, sometimes through a telescope when he was away under sail, sometimes

through a scuttle when he brought his boat alongside; he only knew that as time went on he appeared to have heavier responsibilities thrust upon his young shoulders: to be chosen for the more unpleasant night work in uncharted harbours; to receive a larger proportion of scallywags in his boat's crew to lick into shape. . . . None of these things came to him in the light of compliments. But there came a day when piracy in the West River assumed vexatious proportions and the Great Powers, wearying of protest, announced their intention of patrolling the inland waterways themselves. Then the Commander sent for Euan. It happened to be his eighteenth birthday. To his surprise the Commander rested his hand lightly on his shoulder. The blue eyes held his with an almost fierce approbation.

"McNeil—you think I've been a brute to you, don't you?" He gave the boy a little shake and something like a smile lurked about his bearded mouth.

Euan flushed brick red. "Er—no, sir, not specially——"

Again the Commander shook him gently. "I've worked you like a black, haven't I?"

"Well, sir . . . sometimes—a bit——"

"And you thought I was merely slave-driving?"

"I don't think I thought about it much one way or the other, sir."

The Commander released his shoulder and picked up some papers from his desk. "I didn't leave you much time to think, I fancy. Here are the orders

for the West River Patrol. Take 'em away and read them. I'm going to send you to patrol the creeks with an armed pinnace under the orders of a Lieutenant in the picket boat. There are Midshipmen senior to you in the ship who'll be disappointed. But I've chosen you. See to it that *I'm* not disappointed. You'll be away some weeks, on your own a lot of the time. That's all."

Euan returned to his ship five weeks later, more sun-burned than ever, and grown, in some indefinable way, more self-contained and less communicative. To the Gunroom who thirsted for details he admitted having seen no pirates, but had shot a great many snipe and wild fowl and had a topping time. That was all they ever learned of Euan's first command.

From the Lieutenant in charge of the expedition the Commander heard a good deal more than details of Euan's prowess with a 12-bore.

He listened without comment from behind pipe smoke till the Lieutenant finished, then he gave a little grunt of approval. "He's a good lad, that boy. I hunted him till he sweated blood, and he never squeaked. Now, unless I'm mistaken, he'll hunt himself. Once that begins you can say a boy is in a fair way to making good. Keep an eye on him and see he keeps within limits. Once he starts in that type he has no mercy on himself."

And sure enough as the Commander had foretold, Euan found himself for the first time with the road ahead opening up clear—a road that could only be traversed by desperate hard work and concentration,

a long journey over formidable heights and treacherous levels, past a whole multitude of failures fallen by the wayside. And the goal was Flag Rank—no less.

7

This sketch would be incomplete without passing reference to that mysterious, enticing and almost remote world Euan grew accustomed to refer to as "the Beach." It must be left to the reader to decide how much "seeing life" influenced that immature soul to permanent weal or woe; but I am inclined to think its effect bore the same relation to his ultimate development as the brush of the artist does to the product of the potter's wheel. That is to say, it was superficial and the degree of adornment or defacement imparted thereby always liable to obliteration. . . .

But "Life" he certainly did see—crude, naked and savagely assertive—sometimes with shame, at other times with fear, more often with merriment or ardent curiosity.

On special occasions junior midshipmen were allowed to dine ashore with friends, and one of Euan's contemporaries took advantage of the presence at an hotel ashore of a globe-trotting uncle and aunt to invite Euan to dinner. It was about ten o'clock when they took leave of their host and hostess and stepped into a double rickshaw.

"Go ahead, John!" said Euan magnificently to the coolie. He leaned back puffing at his cigarette, complacently assured that the coolie knew they were Midshipmen from the Flagship and would convey

them to the wharf without further parley—which last was indeed out of the question since the coolie knew no word of English.

The stars overhead blazed like angry white jewels; the warm air was pregnant with the smells of the East; on either side of the dusty road figures in silhouette crouched about the flares of food vendors or moved in dimly-lit interiors. Lantern lights gleamed dully on gilded signs outside the barred and shuttered shops. The coolie padded noiselessly on with a long elastic lope, looking neither to right nor left of him. They had gone a couple of miles when Euan's companion (his name was Cartwright) stirred rather uneasily. "I didn't realize it was so far, did you?" he muttered. "No," replied Euan. "I suppose we're going right. . . ." He sat up and stared through the darkness. At this moment the rickshaw turned a corner.

"What the——" began Cartwright, and stopped.

They were in a narrow street of two-storied houses. Crude kerosene lamps flared in windows and doors so that the street was as light as day, and everywhere, it seemed to Euan, leaning over balconies, lolling in the doorways, squatting on the pavements, were women. They were of almost every race, Chinese, Japanese and Koreans, Indians and negresses, and farther along, where the glare dwindled, coloured paper lanterns tinted the bare shoulders and arms of European girls, leaning out over the balustrade. The air was vibrant with feminine voices; above the jingle of climate-ravaged pianos and outlandish stringed instruments, they came thrilling through the night—strident or melodious, importunate or seductive, with

an undercurrent of laughter, terrible mechanical laughter, sadder far than sobbing.

The coolie slowed down and stopped, resting the long shafts on the ground. He grinned at his passengers and wiped his face with a sweat-rag. Euan looked up at the balcony and saw four or five girls leaning down, looking at him. Their eyes were stained and their faces painted, and they commenced a shrill wrangling amongst themselves, pointing down at the new-comers. Then one stretched out her bare arms to him: "'Ullo, Jack—Eenglish Meedshipman, eh? Gom upstairs, 'ave ze music; trink glass of beer. . . ." Her voice was hoarsely melodious.

"I say!" ejaculated Cartwright in a tense voice. "You aren't going, are you?"

Euan shook his head impatiently but continued to sit motionless staring up at the girl as if hypnotized. She had large grey eyes and yellow hair that hung down a yard on either side of her face in two heavy plaits. He thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Cartwright was adjuring the coolie to take them back to the wharf, in voluble Anglo-Saxon in which there was a distinct tremor of alarm. The coolie merely wiped his face and grinned.

"The confounded idiot doesn't understand a word. Let's——" Cartwright turned to his companion, but that moment Euan sprang to the pavement. The girl with the plaits was in the doorway. "You gom upstairs?" she queried.

Euan stood facing her, his heart beating unaccountably fast. "No. It was all a mistake. We

don't want to come here. We wanted to go to the wharf. The coolie brought us here. Will you tell him? Can you?"

The girl gave him one searching look and glanced back into the house. "Give me money, zen—queek."

Euan emptied his pockets of the few dollars and cents they contained into her hand. She spoke a couple of rapid sentences to the coolie, who grunted and picked up the shafts.

"Good night, Jack," she said softly. "Better you go, leetle boy. And to-night"—for an instant her bare arms were about his neck, detaining him—"w'en you get back, say leetle prayer for Berta . . . w'at let you go!"

Once more they ran the gauntlet of women's eyes and all the sordid clamour of that pitiable Mart, shocked and thrilled by indefinable emotions, and so back to the ship and safety.

That night Euan tossed sleepless in his hammock, filled with an unfamiliar disquiet and the memory of bare detaining arms. He had the deep, almost quixotic reverence of the sisterless for all women, and never forgot that Street of Sorrow or all it stood for in the world of men and women.

They travelled far up the Yangtse—through the China of the Willow Pattern, and day after day Euan landed and trudged weary miles through paddy and cotton under a sweltering sun, in search of snipe and pheasant. They visited the possessions of other Powers, French Cochin China, the Dutch East Indies and Tsingtau, the one German colony in the East. Here Euan studied the colonial life of the foreigner

and ate salt *pommes de terre frites* and drank beer on boulevards that were almost Parisian, or danced with ladies of uncertain nationality in cool marble-pillared Batavian clubs. They lingered for a while among the fringe of islands off the coast of Borneo, and here Euan had his first experience of "jungle-fright" beside which the normal fear of death is but a passing tremor. The Gunroom was picnicking on the shore of an uninhabited island clothed in dense jungle, and Euan left the party to go in search of pigeon. The interlacing branches of the trees shut out the sky, shrouding everything in a sickly greenish gloom. Vines and creepers hung down in dense screens on all sides, with fantastic fungoid growths springing up about the hollows of the twisted lava underfoot. The air was close and sickly with the odour of rotting vegetation, and as Euan pressed on into this eeriness the sound of the surf died away. . . .

He fought with the growing Fear as he advanced and forgot it as a pigeon skimmed past among the branches. He fired and missed, but when the echo of the shot died among the trees it was succeeded by a stillness so complete and so terrible that he took to his heels and ran in blind terror. Twice he fell headlong and sprained his wrist, to say nothing of damaging his precious gun; but he cared nothing for that. All he wanted was to get back to the comfortable sound of human voices and the faces of companions. They were frying sausages in the lid of a biscuit tin when he rejoined them, so intent upon the task that they never even noticed his white face and dishevelled appearance. But he had known Fear and had no shame.

They had been eighteen months in commission when the last of the senior midshipmen departed for Greenwich and "courses," and Euan found himself Senior Midshipman with power of life and death among the batch of juniors who came out to fill the vacant places. Further, he had to maintain discipline and play the part of mediator in all disputes amongst his contemporaries—a task which, if a young man is to do his duty conscientiously and preserve his popularity, calls for tact and discretion of no mean order.

• He knew his ship blindfolded and loved her; it was perhaps an unconscious affection, but at the end of a hard day's shooting or a cross-country run, returning wet and tired in the bows of a sampan, the sight of her lying at anchor in the dusk with the lights glowing through the scuttles and gun ports, and the familiar hum of men's voices rising from her forecastle, would send a little thrill of contentment through him. It was Home.

He knew most of the ship's company by name and all his own division with an intimate understanding of each individual character. The knowledge stood him in good stead in later years, since the types that go to make up a ship's company (or, indeed, any community) are limited, and merely repeat themselves with variations *ad infinitum*. And with that understanding came the gift which is beyond price, can never be counterfeited or abused, the gift of being able to handle men.

The end of the commission came with sudden swiftness. Two years had come and gone, years of strenuous toil and vigorous recreation; of new worlds seen through half-comprehending eyes, holding intense friendships, partings, folly, repentance, hope; and hardly a score of times in those years had he spoken to a woman.

Yet Euan, leaning over the rail of the trooping ship that carried them home, watching the mist-shrouded peak of Hong Kong fade astern, was conscious of no change in himself. "This is ME," he said, as he had grasped at his individuality at the threshold of that breathless crowded commission. And now at its close behold it was still the identical Euan Raphael McNeil over whose head these years had flowed. Nothing stood out penetratingly in all his memories. There had been no moment of crisis from which he had emerged, and breathed deep, conscious of sudden translation into manhood. It had all been . . . imperceptible. Life had just flowed along, that was the only word. And here he was, shaving every day now . . . knowing good and evil.

9

He arrived home just in time for dinner, having purposely refrained from telegraphing the time of his arrival for fear his mother and father would meet him at the station and involve him in greetings in the public eye. An unfamiliar but terrifying shyness seemed to have settled on his soul. Once they were alone together he told himself that the constricting band which felt as if it were fastened round his heart,

would relax—perhaps fall away altogether. Yet when they sat down to dinner it was still there, and his consciousness of it made him constrained and totally unlike himself.

“Now, Raffy darling,” said his mother when the maid had put the soup on the table and withdrawn. “Now then, begin to tell us all about it.” She put one of her hands on his as it rested on the table.

“Oh, mother. . . .” Euan leaned back in his chair and stared with narrowed eyes at the wall opposite. A little smile came into his face. How could he tell them “all about it?” How could he condense the colour and sunlight, the sights and smells and sounds of the station, the crowded mechanical life of the ship, the arduous work, strenuous pleasures, the sum of all the knowledge he had learned, how *could* it all be conveyed in speech?

He squeezed her hand with a quick little pressure and withdrew his own. “I’ve told you in my letters all that happened. There really isn’t anything one can fasten on. . . . It’s a sort of jumble, you know. . . .”

“Must have been wonderful shooting, Euan,” said his father, trying to give him a lead.

“Oh, rather. Priceless,” and Euan devoted himself to the food before him.

“What a lot of friends you must have made, dear,” said his mother with a twinge of maternal jealousy in her heart. Try as she would she could not keep the chill breath of disappointment from her consciousness. It was all so different to the home-coming she had pictured. This lean, self-contained, almost chilly young man, was this her Raffy, the impetuous

demonstrative schoolboy she had given to the Service two years ago? He had not even said he was glad to be home again.

An atmosphere of constraint settled on the room, against which all three strove uncomprehending. Euan's father avoided his wife's eye and shot side-long glances at the well-shaped head of his son, whom he had bidden return a Man and had looked forward to greeting as the comrade and companion of his old age.

The meal came to an end at length and Euan's mother rose. "Bring your cigarettes up to the drawing-room, you boys, when you've had your port," and as she went out behind her son she passed her hand softly over his close-cut, rusty-coloured hair.

Euan filled and sipped the glass in silence. "Jove. . . .!" he observed musingly.

"What is it, old chap?" His father turned his chair a little sideways. "Nothing on your mind, is there? Everything's all right, isn't it? I mean, you aren't in any trouble, are you?"

"Good Lord, no!" Euan turned his candid eyes and met his father's. "Oh, no! It's just that all this"—he embraced with a little gesture the softly lit room and polished table with its shining glass and silver and the doilies he remembered his mother painting when he was a little boy—"takes a bit of getting used to. I——" He hesitated. "It doesn't seem *real*, somehow. . . . It's so different——"

"I know. I know." His father gave a kind of relieved sigh. "But things will adjust themselves into the right perspective in time, you'll see. A

night's rest will go a long way towards it. You want some leave and just do nothing for a bit. We'll go to see some plays and have some hunting. More port? Sure? Then let's go and join your mother."

There was only the firelight in the drawing-room, and Euan's mother had drawn the deep sofa in front of it, and was sitting with her chin on her hand gazing into the flames. Euan crossed the room, and, obeying a little movement she made, sat down at her side. Then, without warning, his arm slid round her, his head was against her shoulder. He snuggled closer as he used to when very small.

"Oh, mother!" he whispered. "Oh, it's good to be home." She stroked his head in silence with a hand that trembled a little.

Then Euan moved. "Dad!" His father standing at one end of the fender with studiously averted face scraping out his pipe.

"Hallo?" He replied without looking up.

Euan patted the vacant place on the sofa beside him. "Come on, Dad. Let's . . . Us three. . . ."

Euan's father blew through his pipe and closed his knife with a little click. Then with his face in shadow he turned and sat down beside his son. Euan linked his disengaged arm in his father's.

The shadows that the firelight set in motion upon the walls and ceiling were the only things in the room that moved. The only sound was the clink of the embers, and once the deep contented sigh of the boy who had become a man.

XII

ANATHEMA

I

THRAULD closed the book he had been reading and threw it on to the settee with a grunt.

"Why is it," he inquired, "that fellows who write yarns about their hero finding buried treasure, and all that sort of rot, can never bring themselves to let the poor blighter benefit from it? Something always happens—Act of God, King's Enemies or Barratry, as the bills-of-lading say—to rob him of it in the end."

"That's right." The Engineer Commander, seated with knitted brows before a patience game of appalling intricacy, joined the discussion while he continued to deal out cards to himself. "I've noticed the same thing. There's generally an earthquake. . . . Knave of diamonds; red knave on a black queen . . . and a mountain falls down and buries the whole outfit. They always end wrong. I wonder why?"

The Paymaster Commander who, when ashore, shared with a wife and child three rooms in a South-sea lodging-house, looked up from the advertisements in a weekly periodical of baronial halls with nineteen bedrooms and grouse moors to match. It was a pabulum which for unfathomable reasons he invariably sought in moments of depression.

"It's a question of technique—literary technique. That's a nice little place. Two hours from London. Wall-garden. Central heating. Stabling for ten. There's a lot in that, you know."

"In what—stabling for ten?"

"No, technique."

"What the devil's technique?" demanded the First Lieutenant, waking up from a doze. "I thought it had something to do with music. Those little black things like tadpoles—you know?" He wriggled an explanatory forefinger and nodded in the direction of a sheet of music lying open on the piano.

"Technique," said the Paymaster, "is skill in art—mechanical skill. I mean, you can learn it."

"I learned to sail a boat when I was a snottie," said the First Lieutenant. "I got a taut dozen with an ashplant from the sub every time I made a fool of myself. The Lord knows that's an art. No one ever talked about my perishin' technique though. Reminds me of a story——"

"We're wandering from the point," interrupted Thrauld, who apparently knew the story. "We were talking about treasure stories never ending happily for all parties concerned. Why shouldn't they? The Pay says it's technique. I don't know what he means. I say it's deuced unsatisfactory. If I wrote a story of that kind I'd let the bally hero stick to the treasure and enjoy himself."

"Exactly," said the Paymaster. "And a deuced dull sort of ending it would make. As a matter of fact, I fancy that there is a popular superstition that wealth accrued in that fashion exerts a malign influ-

ence over the finder. As an ethical consideration——”

“Steady on!” said the First Lieutenant. “What’s ‘ethical’ mean? I like to understand things. I’m a seaman, not a dictionary. I think you’re all talking through your hats, but that’s just my own idea of the discussion and needn’t call for any comment.”

“What I mean to say,” explained the Paymaster, “is that supposing the average fellow found a heap of treasure——”

“Where?” asked the First Lieutenant with reviving interest.

“Oh, any old where—in a wrecked galleon, we’ll suppose.”

“Heaped up in a wreck? Right! Well, I know what I’d do. I’d put in for a month’s leave and go to Monte Carlo.”

“There you are! Precisely what I was coming to. No one would be any the happier in the long run for wealth suddenly tumbling into his lap in that fashion——”

“Oh, rot!” interrupted Thrauld. “Supposing” —he coughed and looked rather self-conscious—“supposing for the sake of argument that a fellow was keen—well, say he wanted to marry a girl, and all that sort of thing, and he couldn’t afford to, and *he* found some treasure in a wreck and on the strength of it he married the girl—eh? What about that, Pay?”

“That,” observed the First Lieutenant, “would make a dam silly story.”

“Well, I’m not talking about technique now. I’m supposing it was real life.”

"Then he'd be an ass," opined the First Lieutenant, who was still suffering from the effects of a somewhat heavy fall in the Lists of Love. "And, what's more, he'd deserve all the unhappiness he got."

"Not if he loved her he wouldn't be unhappy—ever," said Thrauld in the slightly maudlin tone of one who had temporarily forgotten his surroundings. "I mean to say," he amended briskly. "They'd rub along all right, whatever happened."

"How could they," demanded the Paymaster, "if there was a curse on them?"

"Curse?" Thrauld looked startled. "What sort of curse?"

"Oh, a good hearty sort. Tainted gold, don't you know? . . . Treasure like that——"

"Like what?"

"Well, the sort of treasure you'd find in a wrecked galleon, for instance, would be Spanish treasure from Peru. Got by torturing the Indians. There'd be a curse laid on that all right. They knew a thing or two about curses. If you found some and stuck to it, awful things would be sure to happen to you."

Thrauld laughed. "I'd chance it!"

"Me too!" The First Lieutenant rose, stretching himself. "But I'm not worrying. The only thing I ever found was a collar stud, and a bobby saw me, so I handed it over to him with my address in case anyone offered a reward. I never heard any more about it. Well, I'm going to turn in. Cable Officers' Call 6 A.M. 'Night all!"

A little wind came in from the open sea and scores of invisible tongues began to ruffle the surface of the land-locked harbour. They licked its glassy tranquillity with streaks of purple and indigo; flickered here and there as if in quest of cloud-reflections mirrored on the surface, and obliterated them; stirred finally the folds of the White Ensign that hung, still as painted drapery, above the stern of the anchored cruiser.

Half a dozen Wardroom officers were smoking after-breakfast pipes abaft the capstan. One of them raised his head and breathed deep as the cruiser began to swing imperceptibly to the strengthening wind.

"Here's the sea breeze," he said joyfully, "and about time too. It's a make-and-mend¹ this afternoon. What about the whaler for a picnic, chaps?"

"Where shall we go?" asked another lazily. He took his pipe out of his mouth and contemplated the scenery. The curve of the land enclosed the harbour on three sides with steep mountains. A few negro cabins stood amid scrub and hurricane-stunted trees; mangrove clothed the swampy levels reaching to the water. Seaward a cluster of rocky islands stood grouped like sentinels guarding the entrance; a long slow swell heaved into convulsive disturbances about their bases and spouted periodically into white surf.

Against the intensely blue sky they stood out harsh and distinct, heaps of volcanic rock piled pell-

¹ A half-holiday.

mell by some age-old disturbance and left like monuments to a titanic force that had abandoned them and hurried elsewhere.

"What's the matter with one of those islands?" demanded the first speaker. "We can bathe and fish and boil a kettle. . . . Thrauld, are you on for it?"

Thrauld, tall, dark, older-looking than his years warranted, nodded with his eyes on the sunlit sea. "I'm game. I don't know about the whaler—I fancy she's duty boat. But let's ask Barry; it's his day-on."

The Officer of the Day was walking aft towards them. A peculiarly vicious boil on the neck had kept him awake, tossing on his camp bed beneath the awning, till dawn paled the sky. He looked jaded and irritable. Was, in fact, ruminating as he walked on the advantages of chicken-farming over the Navy as a profession. . . .

"Barry, what about the whaler?"

"What d'you mean, 'what about the whaler'? You can see her for yourself if you like to look. She's at the starboard lower-boom. She's duty boat for the day. She's pointed at both ends to enable her to be handled more readily in a surf. She's de Horsey-rigged and is propelled by oars in the absence of a suitable wind. Her coxswain is an ass, and it's my opinion she's got a kink in her. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"Yeth, papa!" A portly officer seated on the bollards suddenly assumed an imbecile expression:

"Can Johnnie have pretty boatie to go ta-ta wiv ickle friends after din-din?"

"Footlin' ass! Didn't I tell you she was a duty boat. What do you want her for, anyway?"

"Picnic," said Thrauld. "Here's Number One. P'raps he'd like to come." The First Lieutenant came up the after hatchway mechanically touching his cap peak in salute to the quarter-deck as he stepped over the coaming.

"Number One, come for a picnic this afternoon? You and I and Thrauld and the Pay. Pay, you'll come, won't you?"

"No," said that officer, "I won't."

"Oh! Well, you and I and Thrauld and a couple of others. We'll land on one of those islands and bathe and have tea."

"Why?"

"Oh, just for a change. Do you good to bask in the sun and get out of sight of the ship."

"Didn't do me any good last time I went. The sun blistered all the skin off my back. Oh, all right! Yes, put me down."

"And it'll be all right to have the whaler, won't it? Barry says she's duty boat, but——"

The First Lieutenant turned on the speaker a good-humoured eye of complete understanding. "Now I grasp why you are so keen to rope me in. . . . Very well, you can have her. Barry, let the cutter take duty boat and have the whaler alongside at 1.30 P.M. with her mast up. Who else is coming?" He turned to the organizer.

"I'm game," said the Navigator. "I shall go to sleep in the shade of a rock."

"Not if the Torpedo Lieutenant comes you won't," said Thrauld.

The Navigator groaned. "Is Wet-o! coming? Help! I wanted a peaceful afternoon. I've been up all night on the bridge. 'A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep——'"

"What's all this?" inquired the stout figure on the bollard grating. "Pilot! Look me in the eyes. Oh, my Lord of Leicester?" The speaker affected uncontrollable nausea and covered his eyes with his hands. "As you were—as you were! Oh, what a horrible sight!" He looked up suddenly. "Talk about poached eggs! Japanese Ensigns would be more the mark."

"If you are referring to the bloodshot condition of my eyeballs," said the Navigator, "let me repeat that I have been on the bridge all night groping for a harbour that was selected in the old days by the buccaneers for their hiding-place on the Spanish Main only because it was so devilish difficult to find the way into and——"

The Torpedo Lieutenant waved explanations aside. "I am no buccaneer. I never asked to come here. I don't want to hide from anything."

"You couldn't," said Thrauld, eyeing the other's generous outline. "At least, you'd have a deuce of a job to do it. Now listen, Winkle: if we let you come to our picnic will you swear not to talk drivel or make a noise when we get ashore? Because most of us want to sleep. The Pilot does, I know; and so do I."

"I shall bring my spade and bucket," said the fat one in an injured tone, "and paddle by myself among the sea-eggs. Don't imagine for a moment I want to force myself upon your beastly party. I know you all

hate me. I am the Mess Scab; you needn't rub it in. No one loves me. I can't help it. I don't mind really. I plough my lonely furrow." Mock grief threatened to strangle the words. "Play my lone hand against the world . . . Ishmael . . . Little Goldilocks . . . A Babe in the Wood . . . Puss in Boots—no, I mean Jack the Ripper—I mean the Giant-killer — no——! O-oh — aw! Pouf! . . . Chuck it! . . . All right I swear—phew! Knock off . . . skylarkin' . . . on the quarter-deck. . . . It's too hot——"

The group stood back from their victim, breathing hard.

"All right. You've sworn——"

The stout one got up ruefully. "Sworn! I haven't started yet. Clean tunic this morning. Look at it. Collar all torn—now I've got to put on another one before divisions."

The island selected by the picnic party was situated a little to seaward of the remainder of the group. They chose it because on its western side a subsidence of the cliff formed a natural breakwater, in the lee of which a beach of shingle ran down to the transparent water. The face of the cliff was festooned by a tangle of bleached vines and creeper, and masses of rock lay about in dire confusion at its foot. To windward, where a flock of disreputable-looking pelicans rose and plunged amid the surf, the evidences of upheaval were more apparent. The strata of rock inclined like a pack of gigantic playing-cards that had fallen from an upright position, and terminated in a bold bluff whitened by gulls and the sun-dried spindrift.

The whaler was beached, the tea things removed to the shade of a rock, and the party proceeded to put into execution its plans of the early forenoon.

The First Lieutenant, Navigator and Engineer Commander, clad sketchily in football shorts and singlets, sought the shade and extended themselves with luxurious groans on the hot sand. Thrauld, after rigging a fishing-rod in position on an outlying rock and casting the bait into the sea, also betook himself and a book into the shade. The Torpedo Lieutenant, having divested himself of his garments, was wallowing in the shallows. Against the blue water his body assumed some resemblance to a large pink prawn. His voice, babbling absurdities, continued to reach Thrauld long after the printed page failed to convey any meaning and the lines blurred mistily. . . .

He slept at length and dreamed about a woman. She was young and pretty, with eyes the greenish-blue of the sea. They were ascending a steep mountain, he pulling her after him. As they climbed she shook her head reluctantly and pointed upwards at the dark rocks that overhung the summit, as if afraid they would fall and overwhelm them. There was terror in her eyes, but he only laughed because his staff made climbing so easy. He held it out to show it to her, and it was pure gold. . . .

"No!" she cried. "No! You mustn't; let me go alone! You needn't come. *Don't!*"

Her face was convulsed with dread foreboding. Her agonized voice rang shrill in his ears, and Thrauld awoke in a cold sweat because face and voice were those of a girl in England, whose parents refused

to allow him to marry her because they said he was too poor.

He sat up gulping and rubbing his eyes. What a beastly dream. Baynes was still wading in the shallows, trailing seaweed about like a child at the seaside and shouting at the pelicans. The Engineer Commander was sitting up, lazily throwing pebbles at him. Clements, the Navigator, slept on his back with his mouth open, one arm resting upon his chest, the other outflung. Against the white sand his sunburnt face and limbs showed dark as mahogany.

Bennett, the First Lieutenant, also slept, curled up half in shade and half in sunlight, with his cheek on his palm. He looked very young like that, almost like a child, with his smooth brow and the shadow of his lashes on his cheek.

Beastly dream! Thrauld gazed his fill at the familiar forms and faces of his shipmates, as if in search of an antidote to the horror that still clung like cobwebs to his thoughts. Poor little Mary. He'd marry her the day he got home if it weren't for her idiotic father and his weak heart.

"I count on your respecting his wishes," Mary's mother had said. "His heart, you know . . . any excitement might prove fatal. Opposition to his will excites him dreadfully." She sighed the reflective sigh of one who for twenty-three years had had to consider that heart. "And you know he is very positive about Mary marrying a man who can give her the things to which she has been accustomed. Indeed, we both are, Mr.—er—Thrauld." She

always called him Mr.—er—Thrauld, did Mary's mother, and while she talked her eyes flickered about the lower part of his face, never rising higher than the tip of his nose.

Money! As if Mary cared. Could people nowadays be such narrow-minded fools! He half closed his eyes against the hot sunlight and stared across the bay, to where palms and mangroves swam in a blue haze. True, hadn't a bean outside his pay and that just enabled him to live and keep out of debt. But Mary's father could afford an allowance. . . . Between them they ought to be able to manage. . . . In rooms. . . . A vision of Mary in lodgings rose before his eyes—he jumped to his feet kicking off his shoes and divesting himself of his shirt and "shorts." "Why not?" he demanded fiercely as if confronted with the adamant sufferer from a weak heart, and then with a short run dived into the water.

He swam beneath the surface as long as his breath held, and when he rose gasping, all memory of the dream had vanished. He swam lustily, rolled over and over on the placid surface, splashed furiously, lay floating still, gazing up into the blue immensity of the sky. Finally, he returned to the beach with long, slow, over-arm strokes, and slipped on his shorts and shirt as a protection against the sun.

The Engineer Commander was gathering drift wood preparatory to making a fire for tea. Clements still slept, but the First Lieutenant was sitting up watching Baynes. The latter was carrying the kettle up from the whaler, affecting to stagger beneath its weight. His rather high tenor voice was raised in

lamentation at being compelled to act the beast of burden.

"That's right!" he cried. "Enjoy yourselves while I do all the work! Hog, and smoke, and bathe. I like getting hernia from carrying heavy weights. I am your serf. I know you all hate me. Little Belgium defies the bully. Phew!" He sat down beside the kettle. "Not another step. Chief, you'll have to build the fire here. Little Lord Fauntleroy's ti-ered. *So* ti-ered!" He lay down beside his burden and drew seaweed over himself. "Come on the robins! Forward, please. Cover us up nicely——"

The First Lieutenant rose and advanced threateningly. Thrauld felt suddenly that the insane babble irritated him. Baynes's high-pitched expostulations with the First Lieutenant administering chastisement jarred his nerves to an extent he never remembered before, even in the confinement of the ship. He was filled with a desire to escape from the sound of Baynes's voice—if only for a few minutes. Ordinarily he liked Baynes and endured his fooling, as they all did, with faintly amused tolerance. But that afternoon something had strung up his nerves. He felt moody and depressed and disinclined for human society.

To the southward, where the island rose by a series of steeply inclined planes to the prominent headland, the formation of the cliff's surface offered foothold for a gradual ascent. The upper surface of the island was clothed with dense scrub, but Thrauld wandered away from the remainder and commenced the ascent of one of the sloping strata of rock, more

with the idea of escaping from Baynes than with any intention of trying to reach the summit of the island.

He found that the smooth surface of the rock offered comfortable foothold to his naked soles, and as he climbed a kind of exhilaration came to him. The air was cooler, and presently rounding a shoulder of a rocky buttress he lost sight of the others. By stepping cautiously from one steeply ascending ledge as it terminated, to the next, he found it was possible to continue the ascent for a considerable distance. He was now on the weather side of the island; beneath him the surf boiled and swirled creamily about the confusion of the rocks. A hollow in the cliff below the water's edge emitted an occasional sound like the lowing of a calf, flinging into the sunshine an iridescent jet of misty vapour with every upheaval of the sea below. Far overhead a pair of frigate birds wheeled and hovered on delicate wings; below, the pelicans preened their rumpled plumage and rose heavily to flop head-foremost into the sea. In their clumsiness and uncouth movements they suggested creatures of an antediluvian age, and the intense loneliness of rocks and sea and sky heightened the effect. The rocks were hot to the touch as if still cooling from primæval fires, but the sea breeze blew cool, fanning Thrauld's sunburnt cheeks and limbs refreshingly.

He paused to get his breath at the juncture of two great slabs of upward sloping rock. A patch of dry wind-blown earth had collected in the angle thus formed, offering a level foothold somewhat cooler to the feet than the bare rock. He stood there, one hand

resting against the wall of the cliff, the other shading his eyes against the dazzling glitter of the sea. The plaint and rumble of the surf below filled his ears. There was no other sound. He breathed deep.

Of what then occurred he retained for the rest of his days the clearest, most detailed recollection. He was aware of an instant's sickening terror, and then a sort of incurious astonishment. The earth about his feet crumbled and yielded like a quicksand. He plunged wildly, clawing at the bare wall of rock beside him, and then, as if the bolt of a trap door beneath his feet had been suddenly withdrawn, dropped through space. How far he fell he was not clear; he concluded later that it was quite a short distance. He landed in a sitting position on the hard sloping rock with a jolt that made him bite his tongue badly. And immediately he commenced to slide. He slid very fast in a shower of earth and debris for a considerable way. It reminded him of a similar experience at the White City in his youth. He had paid sixpence for the privilege of descending a sort of wooden trough on a mat . . . shrieking servant girls and their young men had been similarly engaged on both sides.

Now, as then, he landed with a sense of surprise at not having hurt himself. His feet struck soft, yielding sand, burying his legs almost to the knee. He pitched forward on to his face, rolled over and over, and rose with preposterous dignity to his feet.

"Good God!" he said aloud, and looked up at the orifice overhead through which he had fallen. It appeared very far away, that irregular disc of blue

sky. A shaft of sunlight fell like the limelight in a theatre almost at his feet. Everywhere else was still, warm darkness. He could no longer hear the surf. He listened hard and was aware of something ticking. It was some moments before he realized it was his own wrist-watch. The sound seemed to rouse him to a realization of his own identity. Hitherto he had been a sort of spectator at his own stupefying performance—a very astonished spectator.

He allowed his eyes to retrace the path of his descent. It was the edge of one of the sloping strata of rock, down which he had glissaded. It offered no apparent obstacle to his return to the outer world; he had merely to walk up the steep incline and emerge through the hole whenever he felt inclined to do so. His spirits rose at the discovery, but he made no attempt to effect his escape. His gaze travelling down the ray of sunshine stopped where it rested on the sand floor of the cavern. There half embedded in soft sand lay a human skull.

Thrauld, at this discovery, astonished himself by laughing aloud. The thing was so preposterously melodramatic. In keeping, you might say, with the best traditions of the shilling shocker. No one would ever believe him, unless he took the gruesome relic back with him as a proof. . . . He, William Thrauld, a perfectly commonplace Lieutenant in His Majesty's Navy, suddenly precipitated into a cave upon an uninhabited island in the Spanish Main to find himself among skeletons—a skull, anyhow. He spoke aloud to convince himself that he was awake. "My oath, Miss Weston!" he exclaimed, and was aware of his painfully bitten tongue. Yes. He was awake right

enough. But what was the skull doing there by itself?

He stooped down and groped in the gloom of the floor beyond the radiance of that pool of sunlight. His hand encountered a hard object; then another—lots of them. Bones all right; the rest of the skeleton. His eyes were growing accustomed to the darkness, but not before he had bumped his head on a projecting knob of rock. From the dimly discerned outline of the walls he judged that he was groping opposite what had once been the entrance of the cave, now closed by a great slab of stone. A little to the left lay a dislodged boulder, and here the bones lay thickest. His hand, groping amid shadows, traced the almost perfect outline of the ribs and thigh-bones, and was arrested by the rock. Understanding flashed upon him; the man, if man it had been, must have been imprisoned in the cave by some upheaval that closed the entrance and pinned his legs beneath the boulder; land crabs would account for the disorder of the lighter bones. Shuddering involuntarily Thrauld continued the gruesome investigation. Fragments of what must once have been cloth clung to the remains, but they crumbled to powder under his fingers. Nearer the legs something more durable resisted his touch, and as he jerked at it came away with a faint rattle of the displaced vertebræ. He carried it to the light; it was a broad leather belt fastened by a metal buckle coated with verdigris. Somehow the idea of a belted skeleton seemed horrible. He flung the object down again among its owner's remains and turned towards the sloping rock that promised escape. He had had

enough of the cave; the skull lay grinning up at him from the sunlit patch of sand with ghastly merriment. He pushed his bare toe into the sand under it and jerked it into the darkness where the rest of the skeleton's component parts lay.

It was then that the craving for a smoke gripped him, for he was an inveterate consumer of cigarettes. Without waiting until he had regained the outer world he fumbled in the pocket of his "shorts" for his case and match-box. He lit the cigarette and tossed the match away, turning to commence the ascent as he did so. On the dry floor of the cave the match continued to burn, a steady, tiny flame in the heavy darkness.

He had set his foot upon the upward sloping stone that led to freedom when he observed the burning match. Possibly the discovery of the human remains had upset his rather jarred nerves; his mind was filled with conjectures of the miserable wretch's end. He had pictured him a robust human being like himself, lying there in the stifling darkness; and there he had lingered, pinned down by the weight of the boulder on his crushed limbs, waiting for death through the interminable hours, writhing at intervals like a rat in a gin, tortured with thirst. . . . All this was uppermost in his mind when he perceived the burning match, and somehow to his overwrought fancy, the thought of leaving that infinitesimal flame to burn on in the crushing darkness was unendurable.

The sombre whim turned him back into the cave with some idea of extinguishing the little glimmer of light, when an object lying on the outside of its circle of illumination caught his eye. He picked it

up and realized as he straightened up that it was an old flint-lock pistol. The match at his feet flared and went out.

He stood in the darkness fingering the ancient weapon; then, connecting it with the skeleton, he wondered for the first time what the man with the leather belt had been doing in that cave. Curiosity became stronger than the earlier impulse to regain the sunlight and outer air, to see the faces of companions again and hear living voices. . . . He produced his box of matches and struck one, holding it at an arm's length above his head. Where he stood the vault of the cave was swallowed in darkness; but farther back it sloped to within perhaps ten feet of the ground and continued at this height like the horizontal shaft of a mine. With one hand holding the ancient pistol outstretched before him he ventured cautiously into the interior of the cave, pausing to light successive matches that showed him nothing but bare walls and ceiling of rock. The surface underfoot rose at a gentle gradient and was smooth and dry.

It is strange that even at this stage of his incredible adventure nothing urged him into the recesses of the cave more than a desire to ascertain some clue to the dead man's business there. Nothing was further from his mind than adventure in any shape or form. He was not an imaginative or a romantically inclined young man. The novel he had been reading the previous evening and the conversation of his messmates had, if anything, hardened his matter-of-fact mind against finding anything further. This was real life and the prosaic twentieth century;

true, he had already lit upon a skeleton and a pistol, but it was only in sensational novels that people——

His heart gave a jump and the match went out. He halted, and with trembling fingers fumbled in the box for half a dozen and lit them simultaneously in a little bunch. Holding this aloft like a flare, standing quite motionless and breathing fast, he peered forward.

The cave ended in a wall of rock into which a row of projecting pieces of iron had been cemented. Lower down a couple of rings were affixed to heavy staples and on the ground lay a coil of light rusty chain; in a recess a few feet from the ground a large chest of rusty metal stood open. A smaller one lay on its side on the floor; this was apparently closed. Beside it was a cumbersome black utensil shaped something like a bottle; a fine dust had settled upon the upper surfaces of all these objects and upon heaps of what appeared to be some material lying in disorder beside the open chest.

So much Thrauld's incredulous gaze took in when the flare burned his finger-tips and compelled him to drop the charred ends. Still breathless and with beating heart he lit a single match and advanced towards the chest. In size and shape it reminded him of his midshipman's sea-chest. His first glance into it disappointed him. He recalled the heaped-up barrows of second-hand metal rubbish which itinerant vendors trade in the poorer parts of London on Saturday nights. . . . He plunged his hand into the dusty interior and selected an object at random. It was a sort of basin, incredibly heavy; lead, he wondered? He scratched at it interrogatively with

the muzzle of the rusty pistol and a bright streak appeared across its blackened surface. It dropped from his fingers as the match went out, leaving him once more in the throbbing darkness.

Lead, indeed! It was gold.

For the third time he spoke aloud, his tongue struggling with the inadequacies of human speech.

"SNOOKS!" he said in an awed dry voice. He lit match after match, groping like a child elbow deep in a bran-tub amid the heavy discoloured objects that filled the chest. One after the other he drew them forth, and threw them back after a hasty examination. Ewers and candlesticks, crucifixes, dagger hilts, chains and plaques, bracelets, broken ornaments, effigies of saints, buckles, chalices; all, judging by their weight, pure gold. Underneath this miscellany, as far as his arm would go, were gold coins of different sizes.

The discovery filled him with an insane desire to shout; to fill his lungs with the close warm air and bawl incoherencies with all his strength. He burst out into a husky cackle of laughter instead, and the sound, echoing along that shaft of darkness, sobered him. With an effort he regained his self-control.

Only one match remained in the box. He sat down on the edge of the treasure chest and fumbled with it irresolutely. The perspiration trickled down his face; he could feel it in little runnels over his neck and chest; his head swam dizzily. Sitting there in the darkness he tried to recall all that he had ever heard of treasure trove and the rights of the finder. Perhaps the Encyclopædia would have something to say on the subject. He'd have to employ a lawyer.

. . . What on earth would the Captain say? He had no idea of the value of his discovery, but he imagined it must be of immense worth. He tried to estimate the bulk in sovereigns—thousands of pounds; forty or fifty thousand pounds perhaps. Say they only gave him ten per cent. . . . The bare thought sent him to his feet. He'd get back and tell the others. He'd have to have a working-party told off to get the gold on board. Blast open the entrance. For a moment he had a vision of stolid bluejackets staggering under sacks of gold. . . . The First Lieutenant's face would be worth something to see. . . . He tried to picture his messmates sitting there on the beach eating bread and jam and his sudden announcement of his discovery. But would anyone believe him? A chest full of gold! Idiotic! They'd think he was trying to pull their legs, unless he took something back. . . .

With the intention of selecting something that would afford proof of his incredible discovery, he struck his remaining match and immediately saw the small box lying on the sand. He had forgotten about it in the excitement of finding all that gold. It was of metal, about the size of a seaman's ditty-box, hasped and padlocked, with a curved lid. He picked it up, saw by the last glimmer of the match that it would require an instrument to open, and decided that, whatever its contents, it would at all events suffice to win him the credulity of his messmates. Holding it under his arm he commenced to grope his way back to the entrance of the cave.

He had read sufficient contemporary fiction to realize that what he had discovered was in all prob-

ability the laboriously amassed loot of a party of buccaneers or pirates who had operated in the Spanish Main. The names of headlands and islets in the neighbourhood, still shown on the Admiralty Chart—Dead Man's Knife, Rum-bottle Bay, and the like—suggested the type of seafarer for whom the land-locked harbour had once been a refuge, and tradition was even more definite. It proclaimed that this group of isles had been the headquarters for generations of freebooters preying on the trade routes between Spain and Panama, and later a bolt hole for even less reputable adventurers on the high seas, hard pressed by the King's Ships.

Thrauld pictured the gang putting to sea for one of their periodical cruises, leaving one caretaker to guard the treasure; the ship wrecked or foundered in a hurricane, and the custodian of the cave, the sole survivor, overwhelmed at his post by a cataclysm, common to that part of the world. It would explain everything, and further, it disposed satisfactorily of the possibility of there being any other claimants to share in this fabulous bounty of Fate. Thrauld groped the length of the cave, his thoughts whirling, until he came to the shaft of sunlight and the sloping rock that led to freedom. He felt as if an immense period of time had elapsed since his precipitation on to the spot where he stood. He was conscious suddenly of intense fatigue and a kind of incredulity at the whole adventure that was scarcely dispelled by the pressure of the iron casket against his ribs.

Holding it carefully he climbed laboriously up the rock, and like the welcoming murmur of a vast crowd, the sound of the surf suddenly smote his ears. He

emerged, dazzled and breathless on to the aerie on the face of the cliff. The pelicans still flapped and tumbled, the surf rose in white cascades and flung rainbows about the bleached creepers; the frigate birds still hung poised overhead; the outer world was unchanged; amazingly the same as when he left it.

The picnic party was so intent upon tea that none noticed him till his shadow fell across the group. Then Clements, in the act of transferring a sausage from the frying-pan to the lid of a biscuit-tin that served him as a plate, looked up.

"Come on, if you want some tea. Baynes is making a beast of himself with the sardines, and Number One has finished all the jam."

"Where've you been?" asked the Engineer Commander, cautiously sipping very hot tea out of an enamelled mug.

Thrauld sat down, depositing the rusty casket at his side. He looked at the three in turn as if trying to commit their features to memory before parting with them for ever. "I——" he began and made a wry face. "Bitten my tongue," he mumbled.

"Good," exclaimed Baynes. "Then you won't want anything to eat. I was saving these few sardines for you, but now, of course——"

"What's that old tin you've been lugging about?" asked the First Lieutenant, indicating the box lying in the sand.

Thrauld held it out to him. "Open it. It isn't a tin—it's a box. I don't know what's in it. I—I found it. Have you got a knife or something?"

The First Lieutenant turned it over in his hands.

"Found it! What d'you mean—where did you find it?"

"In a cave." Thrauld spoke in a grave matter-of-fact tone that caused the Engineer Commander to glance at him curiously.

The First Lieutenant was fumbling with his knife, a cherished heavy-bladed affair that boasted a marline spike; he prodded tentatively with this weapon at the rusty hasp for a moment, and then gave a low exclamation. "Come away in me 'and," he muttered. "Rotten with rust." He gave a little wrench and the lid broke off at the hinges.

He raised a surprised sunburnt face. "Full of beads!" he exclaimed, handing the casket to Thrauld.

Thrauld sat holding the box on his knees staring at the contents with a scared expression. "Beads?" he echoed, and dipped his fingers into the interior. "Beads?" he repeated, scarcely raising his voice above a whisper. He drew forth a string of whitish opalescent globules the size of small marbles, and as he extended it the thread broke, spilling a stream of the opaque pellets on to the sand.

With a quick movement the Engineer Commander recovered one and examined it, turning it over curiously between his finger-tips.

"No," he said in a businesslike voice, "you're wrong, Number One. They're pearls."

"Eh?" gaped the First Lieutenant. "Rot! Can't be."

Baynes, kneeling amid the debris of the meal with his face over the box as it rested on Thrauld's knees, gave a croak of astonishment. Thrauld had lifted a

shallow tray on which the pearls had lain. As if to escape from the imprisonment of centuries, a flash of dazzling light seemed to leap out to greet the sunlight. The interior of the casket was ablaze with cut jewels, radiance streaming from their myriad facets. Some were still in twisted or broken settings of gold, but the majority had evidently been removed from their mountings and lay in careless gorgeous indiscrimination.

The eyes of all three companions rose to Thrauld's face in a concentrated gaze of mingled stupefaction and incredulity.

Baynes was the first to recover the power of speech. "I am the Queen of Sheba. Beads I *don't* think!" He stirred the coruscation with an exploratory forefinger. "What *have* you been up to, Teckla?"

Thrauld returned their gaze with curious calm. The Engineer Commander's face wore an expression of portentous gravity, as if the responsibility of administering this vast wealth had suddenly descended on his own shoulders.

"I suppose you realize you're holding a king's ransom there, Thrauld?"

"Yes." Thrauld still spoke in the same awed undertone.

"Well," said the First Lieutenant briskly, "what are you going to do about it?"

3

William Thrauld, late Royal Navy, Justice of the Peace and Lord of the Manor, had finished breakfast. He stood on the hearthrug before the wide, empty fire-

place filling his pipe and watching his wife's profile. She still sat at the table, crumbling a piece of toast into small pieces, her head a little bent as if in reflection.

"It's just that one had hoped . . ." said Thrauld, and sucked at the unlit pipe a moment, "for too much." He spoke thoughtfully, with the air of choosing his words with laborious care.

The woman at the table said nothing; she continued to play with the fragments of toast, sorting them slowly into a kind of pattern with the tip of her finger.

There was silence in the high panelled room, fresh-smelling with the flowers on the table.

"I suppose in time . . ." Thrauld seemed now to be talking to himself, but decided the sentence wasn't worth finishing. He felt slowly and absent-mindedly in different pockets for matches.

"If you'd only *do* something." The woman spoke in a colourless voice; her face still wore its meditative calm, but her fingers had ceased to move about the crumbs. They were clenched in her palm.

Thrauld took a step towards her. "D'you mean to help you? Mary, if there was anything on earth——"

"No, no!" Her calm deserted her. She turned in her chair to face him, her hands closed tightly in her lap. "I don't mean that. I mean occupy yourself. Your mind. You are always thinking—prodding about in my soul—my faults—my——" She stopped and made a little gesture as if wringing her hands. "It's all this money. I don't mean that you're lazy, but you don't really like the things

money buys—you hate killing things; you loathe accounts and business. You pay people to do the things that would give you occupation. You aren't used to idleness; you oughtn't to be idle. But because you are rich you seem to think——”

“If it comes to that——” interrupted Thrauld bitterly, and walked to the open window from where, across the sunlit lawn and rose garden, he could get a glimpse of the sea. “If it comes to that I don't know that you . . .” His voice trailed away to silence. He appeared to be watching intently something beyond the headlands in the morning summer haze.

The girl (she was not yet thirty) flushed painfully.

“Ah!” she cried, and her voice changed to a bitterness equal to his own. “Yes, I suppose it is me. . . . I had forgotten. . . . I had no right . . .” He did not move and seemed not even to hear her. “But it is a long while now since—since the last time I—I—failed you.” Still he did not move. She stared at his broad shoulders and the unresponsive back of his head. “A long while,” she repeated, and rose from the table irresolutely. Her hands fluttered about the roses in the bowls. A frown contracted her finely marked eyebrows. “Months!” she whispered with a sort of gasp, and looked again at her husband's back.

Thrauld turned abruptly, and his face changed at the sight of his wife. It was evident that for a moment he had forgotten her existence.

“Mary,” he said, “there's a battleship in the bay. She has just anchored—not a mile out.”

"A battleship?" She stared blankly. The sudden change of thought and conversation was too abrupt; it seemed to bewilder her. "A battleship!" she repeated. "I was talking about——" she broke off with a little hard laugh, and again her tone changed. "But that doesn't matter. How glad you must be. Perhaps you have friends on board. Anyhow, now you have something to do. You can go on board and see them; talk over old times. That will be nice for you. It will bring back the old days before we—before you left the Navy." Thrauld, already descending the short flight of steps from the windows, turned at her words. Apparently he had only caught the concluding sentence.

"I say, Mary, we must have them to dinner—a dozen or so, anyhow. Will you see to it? We don't want any women—we'll just have a stag party and talk Service shop, and play pool afterwards. You won't mind, will you?"

"Have them to dinner!" she echoed. It was still as if she understood him with difficulty. As if her utmost power of concentration was required to overcome some intense secret preoccupation. "Of course . . . of course. . . . A dinner party. It is so long since——"

Her eyes followed her husband. He had turned away, and mumbling something about overhauling the motor-boat's engine, was making off down a side path that led to the cove and boathouse.

He had forgotten! In that moment of delight at seeing a man-of-war and the prospect of meeting sailormen again, he had actually forgotten their last dinner party and what happened. . . . She took a

deep breath and walked to the open window. For a moment she remained staring into vacancy ; then her eyes took in the anchored battleship looming, a monstrous grey bulk on the surface of the quiet sea. The notes of a distant bugle came thin and distant across the water. Abruptly, for the second time that morning, she made that appealing pathetic gesture with her hands, and turned again into the empty room.

4

Dinner was half over when Thrauld leaned sideways with knitted brows and glanced the length of the flower-decked table to where his wife sat. She was talking with unwonted animation to the Post Captain on her right. Her normally pale cheeks were bright with colour. Her eyes, sea-green in the sunshine, with the fascinating hint of obliqueness at the corners of their lids, were almost black in the shaded pink light. As he looked she threw back her head and laughed without restraint, showing the perfect curve of her long throat. . . .

"Yes . . . ? I'm sorry—what were you saying, Doone?"

The First Lieutenant of the battleship that had come in that morning was watching the froth creaming in his glass as the butler refilled it.

"I was only saying what a pleasant surprise it was seeing you this morning. These experiments we are carrying out on our own necessitate our keeping clear of traffic and frequented waterways, and we certainly didn't bargain on such a delightful evening."

Thrauld smiled. "If you only knew how good it was to see a ship and hear the Navy-talk again. I didn't realize how a fellow misses—I'm hanged if I know what it is he does miss exactly. But all this"—he indicated with a nod the laughing, clean-shaven faces round the table and the hum of masculine conversation—"I was starving for it. Just to hear the old 'shop.' Go on, and tell me about these experiments——" He broke off, and again glanced down the table. Above the hum of voices came his wife's laughter once more, a little louder than before; the butler was removing the fragments of a broken wine-glass at her elbow and mopping the spilt wine off the gleaming surface of the table.

Thrauld turned the menu slightly, the crease between his eyebrows deepening. Three more courses; again he glanced the length of the silver and carnations that half hid Mary from his view.

" . . . so that the figures on the dial must synchronize with the tell-tale in the transmitting station. D'you see? "

What the deuce was his guest talking about? Of course, the experiments. He forced himself out of his abstraction and nodded.

"Naturally with destroyers on a rapidly changing bearing—they get forty knots out of 'em nowadays—you can't guarantee accuracy over nineteen thousand yards. . . ." Thrauld concentrated all his attention on the specialist's explanation; but as the dinner wore on, above the laughter and murmur of animated conversation filling the room, he heard Mary's voice and her strange reckless mirth growing more and more assertive.

The meal came to an end at length. The port had gone round and the King's health been drunk. Then Mary rose to her feet. Never, Thrauld reflected, had he seen his wife look so entrancing as she stood for an instant outlined in her white dress against the dark panelling, cheeks flushed, eyes sparkling. The string of pearls that now were famous all over the world as the "Virgin Pearls"—named from the group of islands where Thrauld found them—hung down below her waist.

"I shall wish you all good night now," she said. "My husband told me this was to be a 'stag party,' and I expect I shall be superfluous. If I've not been that all along!" She embraced the company with a gay whimsical smile, gave her hand to the handsome grey-haired Post Captain and passed through the doorway amid murmurs of gallant protest and the scraping of chairs on the polished floor as the men rose. Thrauld moved into her chair.

"You are a lucky man, Thrauld," observed the battleship's Captain, refilling his glass.

His host cut a cigar without replying for a moment.

"I regret leaving the Service, sir," he said at length.

"Umph. Well, I've done thirty years. Seventeen of those abroad. I've been married twelve years and seen my wife in the aggregate for about five years of that time. My children are strangers to me. I've never had a house of my own. Any moderately successful haberdasher would laugh at my income. . . . As a life's profession it has its limitations."

Thrauld looked round the table with a wistful look in his eyes. "Yet when I came on board your ship this morning and heard the old familiar pipes forward—caught the same indefinable smell 'tween decks—I don't know——" He moved restlessly in his chair. "However, that's *my* funeral, I suppose! What about a game of snooker, sir? There are a couple of tables we can spread ourselves over."

A harvest moon hung low over the sea and threw fantastic shadows across lawns grey with dew as Thrauld led his guests down to the cove where the man-of-war's boat and her sleepy crew were waiting.

He bade them farewell in turn with a queer gratitude in voice and manner, and stood for some time after their departure from the landing-place watching the glimmer of the stern lantern as the motor launch sped seawards in the direction of the anchored battleship, now mere scattered pin-points of light in the darkness. Finally, with bent head and hands deep in trouser pockets, he retraced his steps. His thoughts wandered back over the evening. "Lucky" was he? How much happiness had his wealth bought him? How much happier was he than the specialist who had talked with shining eyes of the arduous toil that might revolutionize modern warfare to which he devoted his days and most of his nights. Yet what did they pay him? A couple of pounds a day? . . . Was he, Thrauld, happier than the Captain who, exiled from his wife and bairns at an age when men yearn for a hearth of their own, ruled over the destinies of a thousand fellow men and five

million pounds of the nation's money? . . . Happier than the rubicund Lieutenant who conjured with billiard balls and drank whisky in appalling quantities without turning a hair?—or the chuckling Paymaster who looked like the conventional advertisement for shaving soap and safety-razors?—or the grave, self-sufficient Engineer Commander to whom the great mysteries of his craft seemed to cling even when ashore—was he luckier than they? The train of thought raised his eyes to the broad façade of the house. It was in darkness save for two lighted windows; they were the windows of his wife's room.

He stood looking up curiously from the lawn, wondering what kept Mary up so late. It was some hours since she had retired, and she couldn't want all that blaze of illumination if she were reading in bed, as she did occasionally.

He passed through into the house, nodded dismissal to the sleepy footman, and made his way along the corridors to his dressing-room. A bright streak of light showed under the door of his wife's room, and as he came abreast of it he paused abruptly and sniffed at a faint, unmistakable odour. He was carrying a lighted candle, and the flame wavered at the sudden trembling of his hand. As if reluctantly, he stepped closer to the panels and listened, but the heavy thudding of his own heart was the only sound he heard. He stood thus motionless for nearly a minute, and then turned the handle and quietly opened the door wide.

The faint odour he had noticed in the corridor asserted itself to a degree that sickened him. Every

light in the room was switched on, their dazzling brilliance reflected in interminable repetition from mirror to mirror, so that the silent room, with its glittering cut-glass and silver articles of toilet on the dressing-table, was one intolerable glare of illumination.

Mary had undressed for the night and was in her dressing-gown of Chinese embroidery, lying huddled unconscious on the great bearskin before the fireplace. From the open hearth, where a bottle lay in fragments, rose fumes that told Thrauld all he needed to know.

A strange emotionless calm seemed to descend upon him. He closed the door and locked it; he extinguished one by one all the lights but a shaded lamp that stood by the bedside; removed the fragments of glass from the hearth, pitching them out of the window on to the flower beds below. Finally he bent over his wife, and, lifting her into his arms as if she were a sleeping child, laid her on the bed and tucked the eiderdown about her. There was a certain deliberation about all his actions; a kind of impersonal tenderness as he bent over her with compressed lips, felt her pulse, smoothed the disarray of her tumbled hair, filled a hot-water bottle and placed it to her icy feet.

At length, when nothing remained for him to do, he unlocked the door and made his way downstairs again to his study. Clearing a space in the middle of the litter on his writing-table, he sat down and with the same calm deliberation began to write a letter.

"Dear Soames," he commenced; then rose, hunted

for a pipe, filled and lit it, and sat down again to his task.

“As my solicitor you probably know better than most men that I am not good at business matters. If, therefore, anything in the following instructions is ambiguous, please use your discretion and aim at fulfilling the spirit in which I give them. What I am chiefly anxious about is that the matter should be terminated as speedily as possible.

“I want this house and all its contents, together with the estate and yacht, sold; the contents of the former include personal jewellery belonging to my wife and myself with certain small exceptions I will give you in detail later. In short, I wish any monetary benefit I derived from the treasure I found to cease definitely and for ever as far as I am concerned, and the following Naval charities to have any money from sales and the dividends from all securities and investments : ”

A list of schools, training ships and orphanages followed.

“I wish to retain the small farm in British Columbia which my uncle left me when he died, together with the few thousands my wife and I have inherited from legacies. This money I want transferred to Canada and the present manager of the farm informed that I intend to come out as soon as possible and work it myself.

“Please endeavour to attract as little attention to the sales of jewellery as possible, and I do not wish my name to appear in connexion with the donations, which are to be anonymous.”

This Thrauld signed, and, sealing it in an en-

velope addressed to a firm of London solicitors, knocked out his pipe. The tables of the room were crowded with photographs of old shipmates, and as he rose one caught his eye. It seemed to be smiling at him with quizzical amusement. A scene of the past came back to him: a shale-strewn beach, the whaler in the foreground and creeper-tangled cliff in the rear, with the noise of the surf reverberating against it.

He was the centre of a little semicircle of curious messmates, holding a rusty iron box containing a king's ransom, and the original of the photograph had just asked him a question. He could answer it at last.

"*That's* what I'm going to do about it!" he said, and held up the sealed envelope as if for the inspection of the smiling face in the frame.

Up in his dressing-room he presently divested himself of his clothes, and in pyjamas and dressing-gown stood for the second time that night outside his wife's door. In some indefinable way he looked younger, more self-reliant and confident than a couple of hours ago. He opened the door softly and crossed to the bed. His wife still slept.

He sat down beside her and, extinguishing the light, took one of her hands in his. The first hint of day was paling the wide casements; the wind that sweeps the path of the sun stirred the curtains, filling the room with a cool earthy purity; under the eaves outside the birds were rustling. For a long while Thrauld sat thus motionless, watching the growing light.

Then outside among the laurels a night warbler

suddenly began to sing, a sweet, full-throated heralding of dawn and hope.

Thrauld bent till his cheek touched his wife's.

"It's going to be all right, Mary." He spoke aloud with passionate conviction. "All right, I tell you. . . . All right. . . ."

XIII

A FLOWER OF THE SEA

I

THE trooping cruiser that had brought reliefs to the China station was sailing in the morning with time-expired officers and men. Following the custom of the Navy, the departing ones were dined that evening by their respective messes, and left for the trooper at a late hour amid the strains of "Auld lang syne" and farewell cheering from the gangways they descended with varying degrees of dignity.

The officers of the three-funnelled cruiser lying inshore had concluded the last of the valedictory rites. The Gunroom had dined three of their number who were leaving for Greenwich College and sub-lieutenant courses; it had been a somewhat bacchanalian affair in which the three reliefs had shyly participated, and had retired early, finding themselves a little superfluous to the revelry. Even that came to an end at length; the cheering died away across the harbour; the ship's corporal locked the doors of Wardroom and Gunroom upon the reeking fumes of tobacco, the torn sheets of music littering the deck round the piano, and the empty glasses.

All about the quarter-deck under the dark awning pyjama-clad forms lay stretched on mattresses and camp-beds, breathing heavily. The officer of the

middle-watch betook himself and a book into the after-casemate. After the roaring of the choruses, cheering and farewells, complete stillness reigned along the upper deck. It was accentuated by the hum of the dynamos somewhere in the depths, the lap of the water against a passing sampan, and the heavy breathing of the sleepers.

The sheeted forms lying on their mattresses were not, however, all asleep. One, stretched beneath the after-gun, lay with his hands clasped under his head, staring up at the black belly of the awning. He had lain like that for over an hour, moving slightly now and again as the soft night air brought a whiff of camphor wood and damp greenery from the shore. The languorous breeze had no calming effect upon him after the excitement of the evening. He had drunk too much, and although the fumes of alcohol had rolled back from his brain, they continued to run like fire through his blood, and his rapid pulse still beat to the rhythm of the roaring bawdy old sea-chanties that had brought the evening to a close.

He was not yet twenty years old, and the tropical night scents filled him with an intense disquiet. . . . Half inquisitively, half ashamedly he followed run-away trains of thought zigzagging into dark forbidden spaces of the soul. . . . He sighed and turned over a little on to his side, pressing his hot palms on to the damp teak deck to cool them. He tried to curb his thoughts, conscious of a sudden whither they were carrying him.

The moonlight lay like a white band along the outside edge of the quarter-deck. He lay with dry lips slightly parted, watching the curved shadow of

the awning retreat before its infinitely slow broadening. It was like a gradually advancing tide of cold white light. He fell to calculating how long it would be before it reached the edge of his mattress; but the unfamiliar disquiet again surged over him in hot waves, and he lay twisting his fingers together, agitated, disgusted, vainly trying to round up and control the headlong gallop of his runaway thoughts.

And it seemed to him that the more he strove to stop them, the more furiously a hooded figure flitting ahead of him plied the whip, lashing them hither and thither in disorder.

A light footfall in the direction of the after hatchway caused him to turn his head. A short squat figure crossed the deep shadow of the quarter-deck and stepped into the pool of moonlight about the gangway. It was the Paymaster, an elderly, tubby little man with a grizzled beard. His beard seemed the focus of a phenomenal growth of hair that covered most of his body except the top of his head, which was bald. It hung in a mat upon his chest and covered the back of his hands and even his fingers. He had a prominent stomach, and, like most very short stout men, carried it with a light-footed, complacent dignity, as if it were a guerdon from the gods.

The boy lying in the shadow saw with astonishment that the Paymaster was dressed to go ashore. Ashore at this time of night! Where on earth could he be going?

The short moonlit figure stood on the gangway motionless. Ashore a few lights twinkled amid the dark foliage some distance up the Peak. They twinkled there every night in a little group till dawn

extinguished them. The Paymaster stood contemplating them for nearly five minutes without moving. His hands were resting on the rail of the accommodation ladder, and in the moonlight the hair on their backs stood out in little black patches.

The watching boy could see his elbows rising and falling against his round sides as his short wheezy breath came and went.

Where on earth could he be going ?

The Paymaster stood with his back to the perplexed watcher. But earlier in the evening the latter, passing the Wardroom door, had caught a glimpse of the Paymaster's face amongst the crowd of vaedictory revellers. He was seated straddling the padded arm of a settee, laughing over the rim of a tumbler. His merriment was somehow out of keeping with his bald head and dignified stomach. It had a mischievous gusto, and gave him a startling resemblance to a representation of the god Silenus heading a Bacchic procession.

There was a creak of *yulo* and the light splash of water under the stern. A guttural voice said something in Chinese in an undertone. Evidently the Paymaster was waiting for a sampan and it was coming alongside. He turned at that moment to descend the ladder. The straw hat he wore was tilted back a little off his forehead, and the moonlight shone on his face, making it quite visible to the boy who lay motionless beneath the after gun.

For some minutes after the Paymaster had descended the ladder with his light tread and vanished out of sight, after the sound of the *yulo* had been swallowed in the whispers of the night, the boy lay

motionless, staring in the direction where he had seen the Paymaster's vanished face. He knew where that tubby, bald-headed, hairy little man was going. As if in the enlightenment of some unlawful freemasonry, he knew; as if the dignified old Paymaster had shouted his shameless secret back across his shoulder as he went down the ladder. And, staring with unblinking eyes, the boy became conscious that they were focused on a little cluster of lights twinkling amid the foliage ashore.

The Paymaster! His own chief! Old, bald, dignified. . . . Phew!

Sleep was an impossibility. He rose with throbbing temples and an evil taste in his mouth. There was no priggishness in his disgust; no outraged innocence of youth. It was just the sight of Age abasing itself stealthily.

Sneaking off. . . .

He walked to the gangway, making no sound with his bare feet on the dewy planking. The cool night-breeze fluttered his thin pyjamas against his limbs as he stood drinking in deep breaths of air. He was a short lad for his age, the light-boned, athletic type with small wrists and ankles; dark, a little inclined to be round shouldered.

He stood where the Paymaster had stood, with his hands resting on the rail, staring, as the other had stared, at the little group of lights ashore. A shrinking fear had driven him from his bed. The unbidden thoughts that had possessed his excited mind shrank down cowed and subdued before that unexpected revelation.

Supposing the years brought him no more wisdom

or control than they had to the vanished grey beard. He thought of the fever that had danced in his veins under the stimulus of whisky and sweet sticky liqueurs. Why, that very night he had found his feet already on the path down which the Paymaster had disappeared.

He turned wearily inboard, and was aware of a pair of eyes fixed on him.

They were watching him from a mattress that lay on the deck just round the angle of the gun shield where his own mattress lay. The moonlight bathed the deck right up to the base of the turret, and, stepping closer, he recognized the recumbent figure as one of the three Midshipmen who had joined that morning. The stranger showed his even teeth in a shy grin.

"Can't you sleep?"

"No. Can't you either?"

"Yes. But I heard a boat alongside and it woke me up. I'm a very light sleeper."

"You're Wilson, aren't you?"

"Yes." The new-comer sat up and linked his hands round his drawn-up knees. "Squat down and have a yarn if you aren't sleepy." He nodded at the vacant end of the mattress. "I've seen so many new faces to-day I can't remember which you are."

"I'm Bridges. I'm a Clerk—Captain's Clerk."

The other nodded. "I remember. They call you Bridgey. You were having a bit of a jamboree to-night, weren't you? I didn't know anybody in the mess, and I turned in early."

"Yes. It was a hell of an evening. We had to

turn Bathers in—he's the Engineer Sub. He got fairly bottled. He always does on these occasions."

"Mug's game." The speaker fumbled under his pillow and drew out a short briar pipe and a box of matches. He lit and sucked at the dottle, which bubbled audibly in the stillness of the night. "Mug's game, getting tight. Not so bad once in a way, but it's a mug's game anyhow."

"Yes." Bridgey was conscious of the taint of alcohol still on his own dry lips. "I made rather an ass of myself to-night. Kümmel. But I don't often do it. Can't afford it."

"We all do things. . . . I smoke too much. Rotten bad for the wind."

"Mine's awful, anyway. I wish I had my pipe here."

"Have a rub at this." The smoker gravely wiped the mouthpiece on a corner of his sheet and held it out to his visitor.

"Thanks! That's fine." Bridgey sucked appreciatively at the pungent briar. He was feeling more normal, and somehow there was something peculiarly restful in the quiet tones of his new messmate. The stranger had a broad face with a short nose and cleft chin, rather high cheekbones, and grey eyes widely spaced. His pyjama jacket was open, showing muscular throat and white, clean skin.

"D'you go in for games much?" asked Bridgey.

"Footer, a bit. But I like running best. It's better exercise than golf and cricket. Golf's all right for girls and middle-aged men, but you can't sweat the vice out of yourself at golf. D'you run at all? You look as if you could."

They were eyeing each other with veiled eagerness.

"Yes. I used to at school. Cross-country runs and hurdles. I haven't done much since I came to sea. Never found anybody who cared about it. It's a dull game alone. Thanks awfully; it's nearly finished, I'm afraid." He handed back the pipe to its owner.

"We might go ashore and waddle round the country together sometimes. It gives one an excuse to keep fit. I must have an excuse to keep from smoking too much. I inhale, and it plays the devil with my wind." He replaced the pipe under his pillow.

Bridgey felt suddenly as if a hand had been stretched out to steady him as he commenced to slide down a long, gradual incline. His heart gave a bound of thankfulness, and with it came the certitude of a great liking for this youth whose pipe he had shared.

"I suppose they called you 'Tug' in your last ship?" he said. "All Wilsons are called 'Tug.' You'll be called Tug here."

"Yes. I was in the *Vengeance* in the Channel Fleet. My people are in India, and I asked for a ship on the East Indian Station, so they sent me to China." The speaker smiled his shy, arresting grin. "They will have their little joke, won't they, at the Admiralty."

"The blighters! What rotten luck! Well, we've only another year to do to finish the commission. Now I'm going to turn in."

"I hope you'll sleep all right."

"Rather." The Clerk rose, shivering a little in the chill of the hour that precedes the dawn. "Good night. I say—I think I'll call you Tug anyhow."

The other stretched out his legs and leaned on one elbow.

"Right ho! Good night, Bridgey."

The Clerk vanished round the angle of the turret, lay down, and, drawing the blanket over himself, sighed heavily and fell instantly asleep.

The Midshipman remained resting on his elbow, staring out across the misty water of the harbour, grey beneath a waning moon.

2

Bridgey met Tug Wilson again the following morning in the gunroom bathroom, which was crowded with naked splashing figures; the majority were chaffing a stout sullen-looking young man who sat in one of the shallow circular baths squeezing spongefuls of water over his head.

"Look at the clouds of steam!"

"My word, Bathers, you were blotto last night!"

"Here's a nice cold angle bar—put your head against it, old man!"

"You tried to kiss me when I took your boots off last night—naughty frisky Bathers!"

Wilson was vigorously towelling himself in a corner, a faint observant smile lurking about his lips, but taking no part in the hubbub and laughter. Bridgey elbowed his way towards him, and the hovering smile changed to a grin of recognition.

"Morning! Want my bath? Here, hang on."

Wilson bent down, grasped the rim of the bath, and lifting it up to the level of the sink, tipped it up and emptied it. The feat was regarded as the standard of considerable strength among gunroom officers. It usually took two midshipmen to raise and empty a bath without slopping water all over the tiled deck. Tug Wilson replaced the empty bath unconcernedly and continued drying himself.

Bridgey surveyed his new acquaintance with renewed interest. He was a boy of middle height, stockily built, with remarkable muscular development. He had a tendency to healthy fleshiness, but beneath that the muscle curved in extraordinary perfection with every movement of his body. Bridgey, a lean herring-gutted stripling, with the meagre calves and small loins of a runner, commenced his ablutions. The contrast between the two nude figures resembled that of a bull terrier and a whippet.

The day that ensued, with its diverse duties and activities, did not afford them an opportunity for much further conversation. Tug Wilson having stepped into the shoes of one of the departed midshipmen found himself keeping what would have been that officer's second day on. Bridgey, busy with the papers of the newly joined draft and the official mail brought by the trooper, spent most of the day in the Captain's office. It was situated between-decks, with the engine-room exhaust running up one side. The only ventilation was a circular coaling scuttle in the deck overhead which also admitted such light as there was, and the temperature seldom dropped below 100 degrees.

Here when the forenoon was well advanced he was

visited by his chief. The little man's fresh white ducks rustled with starch. His cheeks above the grizzled beard were pink like a healthy child's, and he diffused a faint smell of scented soap. He stood wheezing and smiling benevolently in the doorway.

"Well, well, young man! Hard at it? That's right! Making up for last night's excesses, I hope. Shocking orgy, shocking orgy! That sort of thing wasn't allowed when I was a youngster in a gunroom. Well, well! I knew the King's Regulations by heart at your age. Nothing like hard work. Stick to it; stick to it!" He marched aft with sedate dignity and vanished through the door of the Wardroom smoking casemate.

Incredible! . . .

After dinner that night Bridgey felt the stirring of a queer need. He wanted to get Tug Wilson to himself and talk to him; talk to him as he had never talked to anyone. He wanted to tell him about the secret weaknesses he struggled against, about the Paymaster, about numberless perplexities, ideals, ambitions, deep hidden in the secret places of his soul. It was absurd, of course, because when it came to the point he could never say a word of it aloud. But that was the impulse within him.

He found Tug sitting on the after shelter deck, sucking at his disreputable pipe and reading by the light of a lantern. He closed the book as he heard Bridgey's footstep, and knocked out his pipe, but his eyes were still cloudy with the message of the printed page as he returned Bridgey's smile.

"What's the yarn?"

"The Second Jungle Book. It's wonderful, isn't

it? Wonderful. . . . The Spring Running! How did he know all that? And the death of Won-tolla. The Lone Wolf." . . . His voice trailed away. "The Lone Wolf," he repeated under his breath. "There couldn't have been a finer end."

"Yes," replied Bridgey, "it's wonderful. Especially that run through the jungle, and the Spring coming. It's Spring now out here."

"I know; I can feel it. It makes me"—he held out the magic book—"like Mowgli felt."

Bridgey sat down. Every word they exchanged seemed to carry them into a more perfect comprehension of each other. Here was someone who felt as he felt; was stirred by the same things; who strove, he was vaguely conscious, towards some mystic youthful ideal.

"We're leaving here to-morrow," he said. "We're going to Wei-hai-wei and then on to Northern Japan. We can land in footer-rig every day and get into training."

The other looked at him. "Shall we go into proper training right away—keep each other company? Limit drinks and smoking for a start."

"Yes," said Bridgey eagerly. "I vote we don't have any drinks except teetotal ones, and, say, six pipes a day."

Tug Wilson sighed and polished the bowl of his pipe affectionately against his nose. "I'm with you. Shall we shake on it?"

Bridgey held out his hand in the gloom; it was gripped for an instant and released. He felt an extraordinary light-heartedness; he wanted to laugh and shout in the new-found security of this pact.

"We'd better have a time-limit to our contract," said Tug Wilson's level voice. "Say six months. Then if we like we can renew it till the end of the commission."

Bridgey acquiesced and found himself wondering what they would do then.

"We ought to be pretty fit in a year's time," he said.

"Yes. I'm rather keen on getting fit." Tug Wilson spoke as if his thoughts had wandered again.

"Had you any particular idea in it?" asked Bridgey with assumed indifference.

"Yes." There was a pause. It seemed as if the speaker were making up his mind to part for the first time with some cherished secret.

"I'm nineteen now. I want to be middle-weight amateur champion of England before I'm twenty-two." Tug spoke gravely, as his forefathers might have discussed a crusade to the Holy Land. "Then—I don't know—perhaps champion of the world. I live with an aunt when I'm on leave—in her flat in London. There's a low-down gymnasium in a mews near there where I spend most of my time ashore. I box with policemen and navvies and budding professionals in the evenings. You learn a lot from them. Do you box?"

"No," said Bridgey. As a matter of fact, he had the wrong sort of nose. It was as sensitive as a seal's and he had a secret horror of being struck on it.

"I'll teach you. We'll box up here in the evenings. You ought to be all right for the Navy and Army featherweights when we get home."

Bridgey had a vision of his gristly nose being punched every evening for a year.

"It's no good trying to teach me, Tug. No one could box with a nose like mine."

His would-be instructor gravely considered the organ in question by the light of the lantern. "I knew a man—he was a professional—who had the bridge of his nose removed by the doctors because it was a nuisance."

"But I'm not going to be a professional," objected Bridgey. "Besides, if we're going to run every afternoon we shall be pretty tired by the evening. We shan't feel much like boxing——"

Tug smoked in silence for a minute. "I'll get a punch ball rigged up. That won't hurt your nose," he said finally. "But what do you think of doing, then, when we get home? 'Course, there are the Olympic games—the International Marathon. You could train up for that." His earnestness was sincere and complete.

Bridgey laughed. "I know it sounds rather aimless, but I don't want to do anything in particular. I just want to keep fit to—to—what was the expression you used?—sweat the vice out of me. I want to keep off drinks because out here one thing seems to lead to another, and—and——" a terror seized him lest the other should misconstrue his motives into religious fervour. He stumbled on. "I don't want to marry anyone, but I suppose some day I may want to, and I'd like to be able to tell her—you know what I mean, Tug—tell her I'd pulled the stroke through, and all that sort of rot." Bridgey was mumbling his words fast as if confessing some hidden shame,

his eyes fixed on the deck. "I don't suppose it's easy—I know it isn't. But the only way is to live as we're going to, according to our contract. The trouble with me has been that I haven't the guts to do it alone without some incentive or companionship." He raised his eyes and found Tug was looking at him with a smile, half eager, half wistful, but altogether understanding.

"That's just it. I had to keep fit—not quite for the same reason but something like it. I had to do it alone so I made an incentive. I took up boxing. Not the three rounds kiss-and-make-it-up ladylike affairs, but the real thing. It's pretty bloody and brutal, and my friends aren't the sort you'd bring into a mess . . . but they're men. And that's all I've any use for."

Bridgey was silent for a moment trying to visualize the queer home life of his companion. It sounded so different to the lives of any young man of his own age he had ever met or heard of. "What about your people," he said at length. "What do they think about it all?"

"I hardly ever see my people. My pater's a Civil Engineer in India. He's building a dam somewhere in the south. I was born out there, but I came home when I was little and my mater stayed out. They come home for leave sometimes, but not often."

There was a silence. Again Tug Wilson seemed to be trying to overcome his habitual reserve and constraint.

"I may as well tell you the whole thing," he said abruptly. "I've never spoken about it to

anyone, but we—we're going to go on the Spring Running together—I'd like you to understand."

"I don't want you to tell me anything," said Bridgey gently, "if you'd rather not. I mean—if it's too difficult."

"No. You'd better know." The young voice had suddenly hardened. "Some men drink and some gamble and some are unfaithful. My pater is constitutionally incapable of playing the game by my mother if she leaves him by himself. He loves her better than anybody in the world, and as long as she's with him he's all right and never looks at anybody else. But directly she goes away he goes clean off the rails. It's some extraordinary weak streak. He can't help it; it's in his blood. His grandfather was the same, and all the way back they've been the same. He's a topping-looking great chap and quite young, really—they both are; but my mother daren't leave him, and he begs her to stay. . . . That's why I've hardly ever seen them. They were home about a year ago and my father told me the whole thing—it was to warn me, really, and to explain why mother didn't come home. He said it might be in my blood." Tug slowly refilled and lit his pipe. "It is in my blood, and I knew it the moment he'd told me. I didn't tell him that; but I told him he'd better keep mother with him always, because if he didn't and he broke her heart, I'd break his neck with my two hands—father or no father. That was a nice sort of thing to have to tell your own Governor, wasn't it?"

Bridgey said nothing. He sat twisting an unlit

pipe to and fro in his fingers, his eyes on the deck between his feet.

"When they'd gone back to India I worked the thing out for myself. I'm not going to marry a girl and lead her the life my mother has led, torn between the two of us. I'll never marry anybody. I should never—what shall we say?—compromise—as I believe some coves do—I don't know whether it's shyness or fastidiousness, or what, but I can't, and I don't intend to try. I'm—I'm a Lone Wolf."

Bridgey looked up with a tremulous smile, moved to the depths of his heart. "Not alone, altogether, Tug." He picked up the worn volume beside them and absently turned the pages. Then he closed it and handed it to its owner. "I can't find what I was looking for. But—we be blood brothers henceforward, thou and I."

That, I think, was the first and last time they ever spoke about the love of women.

3

No one amongst civilized races, not even youngsters in the prime of youth, can leap at one bound into the joys of a Spring Running. Bridgey got cramp in his calves after the first two or three miles, and Tug Wilson had to halt and stretch ruefully in the throes of a stitch, when they landed for their first run. But they persevered grimly, and in about a fortnight they began to get back their wind and leg muscle.

The ship was cruising in a leisurely fashion round

the Northern Island of Japan, anchoring each evening in a secluded harbour where Europeans were rarities, and once clear of the tiny hamlet of bamboo and oil-paper houses, there was nothing but glorious rolling country sparsely inhabited, with here and there a red-roofed temple half hidden amid stunted oaks. Day after day, when working hours were over, they changed into running things, landed from a skiff on the outskirts of the village, and without a word exchanged set off at a trot towards the hills.

Walking or running they rarely spoke. Side by side, their rope soles making no sound on the turf and sandy tracks, conscious only of each other's deep steady breathing and immersed in their own thoughts, they jogged along mile after mile. Occasionally Tug Wilson would turn his head to note some leading mark or the angle of the shadows to guide them on their return, but otherwise he ran with his eyes straight ahead, his broad chest expanded to the full, an expression of serenity and contentment on his face, breathing evenly through dilated nostrils.

He it was who called the halts, when they flung themselves to rest in a patch of shade and chewed grass stems and lay with relaxed limbs in a glow of physical well-being akin to ecstasy. Even then they talked little; so little that one day Bridgey commented on it, conscious nevertheless of a strange communion in their very silences. "It doesn't seem necessary somehow, does it?" replied Tug simply. A bead of sweat ran down his nose and splashed on to his bare knee as he sat staring with his wide, frank eyes at the verdant landscape and the blue line

of the sea beyond. They had covered seven or eight miles since they landed an hour before, and were resting preparatory to their return to the ship.

"No," replied Bridgey. "It's good, isn't it." He lay on his side, lean as a hungry dog, his skin scarcely damp with the exertion of the run. "I mean, not to have any need to be always chawing one's fat.¹ To be content at that."

"Yes," said Tug.

One Saturday, being a "Make and mend"—which is synonymous for a half-holiday—they had gone farther than usual; they had forced their way through miles of tangled undergrowth up one flank of a range of hills, raced along the flat sandy ridge for some distance, and descended through a thicket of stunted oaks into the valley. It was a thinly inhabited country, chiefly given up to cultivation of the mulberry, and they saw no sign of human habitation.

A stream ran through the valley, and while they were fording it they heard a bell. It rang in slow silvery strokes, a long way off, and they halted to listen. The sound made Bridgey think of a Sunday evening at home and gave him a sudden acute pang of nostalgia.

"I wonder who's ringing that bell," said Tug. "Shall we go and see? It's a long way off, but I think we've time." They siid into their steady jog along the bank of the stream, travelling in the direction of the sound. It floated down the warm afternoon air with a sort of mysterious sweetness; a silvery tinkle that suggested infinite simplicity; the simpli-

¹ Navalese, signifying ardent talk.

city of children and of a faith outworn long, long ago.

The valley narrowed gradually, and at length where the foothills closed in upon mountains splashed with the blossom of the wild cherry, the sound of the bell grew clearer. They entered a grove of pines, and the bell which filled the sunshine with its mellow sound ceased abruptly. The fugitive echoes whispered away among the rocks on the mountain side as if they were naiads fleeing at the approach of fauns. Then the stillness settled down drowsy and warm, like dust that had been disturbed.

Tug Wilson, who was leading with a light tread and head raised questioningly, halted suddenly. In a little clearing, approached by a single arch of red wood flanked by moss-grown monsters hewn out of stone, stood a Buddhist temple. The wide doors stood open; it was quite a small edifice of wood with polished floor and a tiny lamp burning on the altar before a statue of the god. The interior, by contrast with the sunshine, was dim and shadowy, and save for the pillars supporting the roof, appeared to be as devoid of occupant or ornament as a polished box.

"Joss-house!" said Tug Wilson under his breath. In the warm hush of the little glade it seemed a sacrilege to speak aloud. Bridgey nodded and they walked softly on to the threshold.

A very faint odour of incense and of cedar wood greeted them, and they saw that the temple was not empty. An old peasant woman, withered and brown, knelt before the statued Buddha that stared out over her head in eternal contemplation of the valley framed by the wide-open doorway. She was praying for the

repose of the soul of her son, who had died many years before on 203 Metre Hill, with his teeth in a Russian's windpipe.

For a moment the two runners stood motionless, scarcely breathing. Then very very quietly Bridgey turned and led the way back through the arch into the valley. Tug broke the silence, which was an unusual occurrence.

"D'you ever do that?" he asked.

"What?"

"Pray."

"Yes," replied Bridgey. He and his brother had been brought up to the observance of a simple faith by their widowed mother. "When I want anything very much it seems only natural to ask for it. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know anything about religion," said Tug calmly. "I know there must be a God. I'm not such an ass as to imagine all this"—he waved his hand at the smiling valley—"made itself; but it seems to me, and my aunt agrees with me, that if you don't bother God, God leaves you alone and doesn't bother you. I don't like the idea of praying whenever you want something, so I never pray at all. I've had a go at reading the Bible, but I find I get more good out of the Jungle Book. That's my Bible, and if I ever did pray I'd pray to die like Won-tolla died, outnumbered in a fight."

Bridgey said nothing to this frank admission of paganism. He accepted the simple orthodox faith of his childhood without question or speculation. But subsequent experience of life had taught him a wide toleration for the divers creeds of humanity, and after

all there seemed little enough difference between himself kneeling at his sea-chest beneath his hammock, the old peasant woman with the mud of the paddy fields on her bare legs prostrate before a gilded statue, and Tug, chewing the stem of his pipe over the Second Jungle Book. They were all on widely separated but converging paths that met in the end, somewhere out of sight.

"We must get along," said Tug. "Can do?"

"Can do," and they fell into step, back along the valley, trotting peacefully side by side with their elbows lightly touching at every other step.

4

The Gunroom left them very much to themselves, with the good humoured tolerance a naval community extends to the idiosyncrasies of its individuals. Had Tug Wilson and Bridgey elected to embrace Shintoism or sun-worship or sword-swallowing as a means of hammering out their souls' salvation, the Gunroom would have regarded their efforts with just the same chaffing indifference, as long as they did not interfere with the collective life of the mess. To some extent it was interested in Wilson's physical development, for the arduous runs had sweated the superfluous flesh off him and left him a mass of bone and muscle. He had coaxed the blacksmith to make him a 100-lb. bar-bell, and was accustomed to wield this prodigious thing in the early morning in the comparative seclusion of the shelter deck; and gradually tales began to spread of his great strength and endurance, until he was invested—anyhow, on the lower deck—with an

almost legendary renown. Bridgey sunned himself in a sort of reflected glow of this admiration. No one took much notice of him and his running. He would have liked to have bragged mildly in the mess when their runs began to lengthen and they returned, foot-sore, jaded and exhausted after twelve or fifteen miles across unknown country. But Tug discouraged references to their achievements in public, and so it was never known to what degree of physical perfection Bridgey was advancing. And since he no longer joined the sing-song party round the piano after dinner, when the younger members of the Wardroom dropped in, and drinks circulated rather freely, he lost his identity and became merely Tug Wilson's pal. Which was his and Tug Wilson's affair and interested nobody.

As a matter of fact, their evenings together were moments of luxurious relaxation to which they looked forward all day. The hungrily awaited pipes appeared together with a mysterious pouch of tobacco blended by Tug (it was some mild variety mingled with the tinned "ship's" tobacco and seasoned with shavings of rum-soaked plug), which they found a satisfying and aromatic concoction. They saved up three of their six pipes until the evening. The first they smoked greedily, in beatific silence, drawing the smoke into the depths of their lungs and expelling it reluctantly in clouds through mouth and nostrils. Then when that was finished and their pipes had cooled they would refill, and comfortably ensconced in some corner of the shelter deck or in the lee of the after conning-tower, light up for the leisurely smoke that accompanies conversation.

Tug Wilson, for all his stalwart self-reliance and strength, had a singularly naïve outlook on life. He had read very few books, and knew practically nobody outside his naval and pugilistic acquaintances. His experience of drama was limited to such places of variety entertainment as "featured" weight-lifting displays, horizontal bar gymnasts, and such-like strenuous forms of dramatic art. He visited the music-halls of London in turn when on leave, and was invariably accompanied by his aunt.

"We only go for the strong-man turn," explained Tug, "and then we shove off, unless there's a Cove with a red nose and baggy pants. My aunt likes them. We don't go much on the rest—women with practically nothing on but a bit of gauze dancing about. . . . That's a bad trail." Bridgey presumed that this was Tug's summing-up of the Russian Ballet. "I'd like you to meet my aunt," continued Tug reflectively. "She's as ugly as anything and as old as the hills, but she's a topping good pal. She's got a pretty decent biceps, too, considering she's a woman. I make her do Sandow's exercises when I'm home, but she gets awfully slack when I'm at sea. I owe pretty well everything to her. She gave me the Jungle Books . . . when I was twelve."

Bridgey reflected that Tug's aunt must be a very remarkable lady.

Partly as a result of his circumscribed acquaintance Tug Wilson accepted Bridgey's statements, stories, and descriptions of everything outside his own experience, with the simplicity and trust of a child. He asked innumerable questions about the social side of life which he had deliberately shunned, yet which

appeared to afford him boundless interest. "I suppose you've been to dances and things like that when you're on leave?" he said with a certain wistfulness in his tone.

"Oh, yes," said Bridgey carelessly.

"What d'you talk about to these girls? I'd be afraid of touching one for fear of breaking her! Suppose you ask a girl for a dance and she doesn't like the cut of your jib, what are the rules? And if you see a fellow you know to be a swine put his arm round some jolly nice girl and dance with her, doesn't it make you want to mash him into a pulp? Nobody would thank you if you did, I suppose. It wouldn't be considered quite the thing—eh?"

"No," said Bridgey.

Tug sighed. "Well, I don't miss much, really."

"No," Bridgey said again.

If they had been ashore that afternoon they discussed the run during the third pipe, recalling incidents and scenery, and going over it, mile by mile, in retrospection. Then Tug Wilson would turn to the ambition of his life, and discuss possible opponents, their weak spots and their achievements in the past. He did not box much on board; he was curiously shy about his prowess with the gloves, and contented himself with a punch-ball and running, with weight-lifting and stroking the Gunroom racing gig whenever the crew could be persuaded to go away.

Once, however, he did box in public, and his popularity on the lower deck (he had a remarkable gift for handling men considering his youth) rose to its zenith in consequence. He was Midshipman

of the afternoon watch one drowsy summer day at Wei-hai-wei. The Officer of the Watch, after yawning away the first hour of his vigil, retired to a deck-chair in the casemate, leaving Tug to pace the deck beneath the awning and look after the humdrum routine of the ship.

A party of quarter-deck men were scouring the brass top of the after capstan. The Captain of the quarter-deck and a couple of favoured underlings were "worming" the guest-warp with white line; two carpenter's mates worked with the whispering mysterious concentration of craftsmen, replacing a length of planking by the starboard gangway that had been deeply scored when the accommodation ladder was last got out.

Tug, his telescope under his arm and his hands behind his back, watched these various activities in turn, and was suddenly aware of a slight bustle about the screen door. The corporal of the watch appeared shepherding aft a listless-looking second-class stoker, followed by a tall, raw-boned leading stoker. The corporal of the watch assigned a position on the quarter-deck to his victim and guided him on to the precise spot. The big leading stoker, with a self-complacent expression, ranged opposite, stood easy, and gazed into vacancy over the head of the defaulter.

The corporal of the watch having arranged the preliminaries to his satisfaction, marched briskly aft, saluted Tug, and, with a click of the heels, announced:

"Defaulter, sir." Adding in an undertone: "Mr. Osborne, sir, 'e's asleep in the casemate. P'raps you'll call 'im, sir."

"What's the case?" asked Tug.

"Usin' improper langwidge, sir, to a leadin' stoker."

"I'll hear what he has to say," said Tug, and advanced towards the accuser and accused.

"Shun! Orf cap stoker 'Obbs, sir, did use improper langwidge to leadin' stoker Murphy."

Tug turned to the leading stoker, who repeated the language which had outraged his susceptibilities as a leading stoker. It was improper enough.

"And what have you got to say?" asked Tug of the sullen lad fingering his cap.

As a matter of fact, the story was what he had expected. The leading stoker had been bullying the lad, knocking him about to make sport for the watch below on the stokers' mess deck. He was a notorious heavy-weight, bully of the lower deck. Tug, with his eye for that type of man, had observed him on several occasions during dog-watches on the forecastle when the ship was at sea and he was keeping watch on the bridge; had watched him box ashore at hole-in-the-corner fights with dubious Americans and regimental champions. He knew his man.

"Stand over!" He dismissed the accused and motioned the leading stoker to remain.

"You say you were skylarking with this boy. You've no business to skylark with stokers."

"Truth is, sir, I don' know me own strength. I didn't mean to 'urt the little feller, an' 'e 'adn't no call to insult a leadin' stoker what was only 'avin' a bit of a game wiv 'im—actin' playful like."

"Are you a playful man as a rule? I mean, playful as you were with stoker Hobbs."

"Certainly I am, sir."

"So am I," said the Midshipman of the Watch, with his wide eyes on the other's face, and a queer smile hovering about the corners of his mouth. "We might play together, don't you think? This evening, for example, in the first dog. I'll bring some gloves forward on to the forecastle—in case we hurt each other by mistake—and I shall expect to see you there at 5 P.M."

The leading stoker gazed blankly at the young officer, and then some dim comprehension of his meaning dawned on him. He had been brought up in a boxing booth as a lad and loved an audience. He pictured himself showing off to his heart's content before the ship's company on the forecastle. With his advantage in height, weight and reach, he decided he could make a showy affair of the bout. A slow smile crept over his brutal features.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Carry on."

At 5 P.M. Tug, his hands in the pockets of his flannel trousers and a thoughtful expression on his face, walked forward. He had not mentioned the incident to anyone except Bridgey, who had secured a vantage place on the forebridge, from which he could look down on to the forecastle. But the corporal of the afternoon watch had spread the buzz along the lower deck, and several hundred men had crowded on to the forecastle.

They swarmed over the gun-shield and shelter deck, and clustered four deep round an open space where the Petty Officer Gymnastic Instructor was waiting with the gloves. Every man present knew

the story—it had been the one topic of conversation at tea, and the great gathering was in a state of tense expectancy when Tug walked quietly through the lane they had made for him.

"Knock 'is 'ead off, sir." . . . "This'll learn 'im." . . . "'E's copped it this time." . . . Voices murmured in Tug's ears as he passed the grinning, sunburnt faces.

He nodded at Leading Stoker Murphy, who had stripped to the waist and stood, arms akimbo, chewing gum in a corner of the ring; then he turned to the Instructor.

"Leading Stoker Murphy and I are going to box a few rounds," he said in his clear voice. "We want you to take the time for the rounds—two-minute rounds. One of us will say when we've had enough." There was a murmur of amusement at the last sentence. Tug stood gravely while the Petty Officer laced his gloves, and then turned to his opponent.

"Ready, Murphy?"

The Leading Stoker stepped forward, and they touched gloves.

It is not proposed to chronicle the bout in detail. The Leading Stoker, confident and bent on boxing to the gallery, blew out his chest, slapped his thigh with his open gloves, scowled terrifically, and went through the various preliminaries dear to the sailor boxer who is giving a display with an inferior opponent.

A stinging right and left to the jaw decided him to abandon these histrionic "frills" and to settle down to boxing. By the middle of the second round he had

fallen back on the tactics of the boxing booth and was fighting all he knew. Then Tug began to enjoy himself. This was the sort of scrapping he was familiar with. Every trick of professional ringcraft, every dubious hold and elbow-jolt was like meeting an old friend.

He settled down to administer the chastisement he intended to give, and gave it without mercy to a man two stones heavier and four inches taller than himself. In the middle of the fifth round he had his man across the ropes and swaying with his gloves before his face. He stepped back and waited a moment.

"I think we've had enough, don't you?" he said, smiling for the first time.

The big man wiped the blood from his face with his forearm and held out his gloved hand with a crest-fallen grin. They shook hands in silence.

"You'll find a pint of beer waiting for you in the Gunroom pantry when you like to go aft for it," said Tug under cover of the hum of conversation as the spectators moved away. And that was the end of the incident.

5

It had never occurred to either Tug or Bridgey to analyse their friendship—to poke about amid the swift, vigorous growth to try and find what its roots were so securely embedded in. They were content to accept it as a fact, conscious that they were always happiest together—indeed, apart they were aware of something lacking; a sense of incompleteness. It was a sane, cheerful, and unsentimental affection; though as time went on it deepened into a kind of

grim tenderness in their hearts, it never found expression on their lips.

By one of those rare coincidences—so rare that *Odysseys* and *Sagas* are written to record them—each was the perfect complement of the other. Apart they were crudely themselves, “filled with imperfect virtues.” But together, out of their joint imperfections, they contrived to build up something which approached their common ideal of character. What one lacked the other gave, and so their ideal moved through life ahead of them, adorned with what was best in both.

It may appear that there was a degree of priggishness in all this; but it must be remembered that their aim was not, after all, so spiritually exalted. Tug saw in complete physical and mental well-being the supreme ambition of man. Purity of mind and body was more an indispensable concomitant than the end to aim at. Amateur middle-weight champion of England was the goal as far as he could see it, to be striven for in honour and cleanliness.

Bridgey's idealism was of a more romantic turn. He was born to be a lover. In a former age he would have worn a lady's favour in his helm and found self-expression in knight-errantry at every turn of the road. As it was he filled an inconspicuous niche in the Accountant Branch of the Royal Navy, with a mother who, fortunately for him, had taught him to reverence women. He revered them to a quixotic degree; individually he knew very few, having no sisters and being at sea through the years when the majority of young men are learning to understand something of the opposite sex. Bridgey at the age

of twenty saw them as beings of altogether finer clay than men, dwelling aloof from the life he knew.

“ . . . mystic, wonderful.”

Had he lived, as I said, in remoter times, he might have been a knight-errant or a troubadour; instead, he jogged at Tug Wilson's side along the straight path of a robust asceticism. It was his belief that only in this way he could ever qualify himself physically and morally to woo the exquisite creature whom Providence should send to be his mate. He regarded the consummation of his romantic expectation as something very remote; but hidden in the mist of years ahead he was convinced that she was waiting for him, with shining grateful eyes and hands tremulously outstretched to her most perfect knight with the unsullied lips. . . . Remote as the Vision was he had formed a clear enough conception of what she was like. Her name was Rosemary-that-is-for-Remembrance. Bridgey wasn't clear what the Remembrance was of, but he liked the sound of the whole thing, regardless of its triflingly inconvenient length. She was built up into a sort of composite of the heroines of romantic verse and prose, and Bridgey's mother, as he saw her with the love-blind eyes of a son. He put her height at about five feet six inches, with reddish-gold hair and a rather wide mouth. Her eyes were as blue as cornflowers, and she had a tip-tilted nose. It was inevitable perhaps that she should undergo modifications from time to time according to passing influences cast by the heroine of a new book, a partner at a dance ashore, and visitors to Gunroom “tea-fights.” Once after a

moonlight riding picnic at Shanghai (in the course of which Bridgey and his fair companion got lost, Bridgey's horse cast a shoe, and the fair companion's hair escaped from its pins and fell in heavy rolls about her shoulders) poor Rosemary's eyes became grey and her hair quite definitely darkened to brown, and remained so for a considerable period. At Batavia, where the ship stayed a week, which the Consul's daughter always looked back on as the week of her life, Rosemary's inches dwindled and her nose took on a strictly classic outline. At Hong-Kong, six months later, she swelled into an amazonian richness of figure with a deep contralto voice never quite free from the Celtic inflection of caress. Finally, at Wei-hai-wei she was a laughing immature schoolgirl, slangy and merry-eyed, knowing one passion only—strawberry ices.

But these metamorphoses were transient enough, and in the long run Rosemary always reverted to type—tip-tilted nose, wide mouth, and all the rest of it. Because they had no secrets from each other, Bridgey told Tug about Rosemary. Tug, who never spoke to a woman, was as usual gravely interested, recommending light Swedish exercises before an open window, summer and winter, that Rosemary might excel among women. "She walks beautifully," said Bridgey shyly. "You can tell she's as fit as anything."

"I hope she doesn't wear stays, and powder herself, and rot of that sort?" queried Tug. "My aunt's got no use for stays."

"Of course not," said Bridgey with the utmost fervour.

The essence of their relationship can perhaps be best illustrated by an incident—or, rather, two incidents—which occurred towards the end of the commission, when the passing weeks brought nearer and nearer the thrilling anticipation (for Bridgey, anyhow), of home-coming, and to both a growing realization of the blank which approaching separation threatened.

They had planned to climb a certain mountain together as a finale to their year of arduous physical endeavour. It lifted its head into the clouds some five or six miles from where the ship was anchored, standing amid a desolate and practically uninhabited stretch of country. They obtained a day's leave for the enterprise, and with a small packet of food each set off to negotiate the climb. To husband their strength they walked instead of running, as usual, until they came to the foothills, and from there they surveyed the mountain and discussed the best route to ascend.

In decisions of this sort Tug usually had the last word to say. But for the first and last time on this occasion Bridgey demurred. Tug was for going straight at it, regardless of difficulties, but Bridgey pointed out what looked like a precipitous bit near the summit, and declared it couldn't be done. His plan was to ascend along the ridge of a shoulder and thence by what appeared to be a footpath or goat track where the going was quite practicable. Tug was obstinate, however. "There's only one way to climb mountains," he declared, "like everything else in life. Go straight at it and don't stop till you get to the top."

Bridgey pointed out that in some cases this would involve flying.

"Not in this case," persisted the other. "I bet you I can do it. I tell you what, Bridgey; we'll have a race; each go his own way and we'll meet at the top. It's a couple of hours' climb whichever way you go."

Bridgey assented, staring up at the lonely peak about which tags of cloud hung like sheep's wool on a hedge.

"Right-ho!" he said. "But don't waste time over that precipice. You couldn't climb it alone; you want ropes and things—you'll have to go round."

"I'm not going round," said Tug. "So long," and started off.

As a matter of fact, Bridgey had under-estimated the stiffness of the climb, and although he scarcely paused for breath all the way up, it was three hours later when he toiled wearily to the little plateau that formed the summit of the peak. Tug was there sitting with his hands clasped round his knees and bowed head. He raised it as he heard Bridgey approach, and showed a grey haggard face, wet with perspiration.

"What's up?" exclaimed Bridgey. "Hurt yourself, Tug?"

Tug shook his head, and then, to Bridgey's astonishment, crawled on hands and knees to the edge of the tiny plateau and looked over. "Come here," he said in a choked voice.

Bridgey looked down an almost vertical drop of two or three hundred feet.

"My God! Tug, you didn't come up there?"

"Yes. It wouldn't have been difficult if the rock had been sound. There are plenty of ledges and cracks to hold on by. It was no harder than climbing a ladder, really. But when I was about ten feet from the top—d'you see that ledge?—I was holding on to a crack, and the rock under my feet began to crumble away. I thought I'd be all right as long as my finger-grip held, but suddenly *that* bit of stone worked loose and began to slip. . . ."

Tug sat back with a countenance still ghastly white. "Bridgey! I was in the most contemptible agony of fright. I've never been frightened before in my life—really frightened. But my knees went all wobbly and I felt sick—I believe I felt faint—faint with fright. I knew if that stone slipped another inch I was done. I'd just go backwards three hundred feet or so. And I prayed for it to hold. I prayed for all I was worth.

"Well, the thing held and I worked my way up to a fresh grip, and I got to the top. I couldn't stand when I got there. I've been sitting here waiting for you. I wanted to tell you . . . and there's something else . . . I read it, I remember. Not in the *Jungle Book*. About 'thy God shall be my God.' . . . I prayed because I was in a holy funk, but I reckon I made a contract with God. We haven't got much longer together this commission, but we'll hit *that* trail together for the rest of the time, old lad."

"Rather," said Bridgey, and for the second time in their lives they shook hands, shyly with averted eyes.

They ate some food and rested for half an hour. The colour crept back into Tug Wilson's face and he regained his spirits, but when Bridgey suggested starting their return journey he turned his back to the precipice and meekly followed the other down the more circuitous route by which Bridgey had ascended. They had not gone far before the mist, that had been hanging about in patches all day, suddenly swirled up to meet them, enveloping them in a damp blanket of vapour. They halted and stared at each other.

"I suppose we're all right as long as we keep on going down hill?" said Bridgey.

"Yes," said Tug. "We'll pass through it in time and get our bearings. We ought to be able to see the ship soon. But we'll have to smack it about or it'll be getting dark."

They started off again, jumping, scrambling and sliding through the dripping undergrowth that clung to the flanks of the mountain. Bridgey, lighter on his feet than the other, led the way, leaping from one foothold to another like a goat. Suddenly he went down, pitched sideways and slid into the mist amid a shower of stones and debris. Tug followed in the direction Bridgey had disappeared and presently came to him, sitting holding his ankle.

"Hurt?"

Bridgey gave a twisted smile. "Ankle." He tried to rise and sat down again. "Damn!" he muttered.

Tug examined the injury with deft experienced fingers. "I don't think it's broken. You must have jolly nearly dislocated it, though."

"Yes." Bridgey bit his lip. "You'd better go on to the ship and bring a party back for me."

"We'd never find you in this fog. It muffles sound when you yell. Besides, it would be dark before we could get ashore again, and you'd have pneumonia by then, anyhow. No, I'll carry you on my shoulders."

"You can't," said Bridgey. "It's seven or eight miles to the ship. And we've had a pretty strenuous day already."

"That's all right," was the quiet answer. "Can you manage to stand on one leg a second? Steady does it—hurt you? Now then. . . . Heave! Right you are! You don't weigh anything to speak of." And so they resumed their journey.

Bridgey was light enough, but even Tug's superb strength was taxed to the uttermost when they reached the landing-place. Bridgey felt him reel with fatigue as the boat came in sight. "I wonder how many blokes could have done this?" he murmured through clenched teeth, for the pain of his ankle made him feel sick.

"It's nothing," gasped Tug exhaustedly as he laid his burden down. "It's been good hunting . . . and a fine finish . . . to a fine trail."

6

This was the end of the trail, as Tug had said. In a month they were on their way home, lean and brown and muscular, as fit as a whole year of strenuous physical exercise and hard work could make them.

They discussed no more of the future than what was bounded by their foreign service leave. They had, to quote Bridgey's rowing slang, "pulled the stroke through," and were content at that, leaving to Providence and the unknown years ahead the fulfilment of the ideals for which they had laboured. Their friendship had struck its roots down deep, deep in the verities of the human heart and all that is abiding in it. Its sturdy growth had sheltered them from the gales of mischance, its shade from scorching passions, and on the eve of parting they were conscious that it was flowering all about them with a faint clean fragrance never to be forgotten while life lasted. They devoted much leisure on the homeward journey to planning what they would do on leave. Tug was going for a brief visit to his aunt and was then coming to Bridgey to make the acquaintance of his mother and brother; the latter was at Sandhurst and had secured Tug's approving interest by winning the Cadet's Sabre Competition at Olympia. In return Bridgey was to be Tug's guest, with a promise of being permitted to pinch the remarkable biceps of Tug's most remarkable aunt, and of speedy intimacy with the hard-knuckled clientele of the gymnasium in the adjoining mews.

In this high anticipation they parted at Paddington, finding no words to frame one single thought of all that filled their hearts. But "So long!" said Tug and "So long!" answered Bridgey as they climbed into their respective taxis; and Bridgey had his last glimpse of the Lone Wolf waving a bowler hat out of the window of the cab as the traffic swallowed him.

No one nowadays ought to drag the war into stories. A story that crosses the shadow of those dark years must cross quickly and pass out into the light beyond. Nevertheless the war brought to Tug Wilson release from a self-imposed burden he might have found some day beyond his strength.

There was a battle in the Pacific in the early days; the sun went down on it in blinding glory, and the moon saw it end as the last White Ensign sank beneath the waves; a fight to the finish against overwhelming odds, from which no Englishman returned to tell the story. In that fight, outnumbered and outranged by an enemy with superior speed, Tug died for England, which is a finer thing even than being her amateur middleweight champion.

A sweating babu telegraph clerk toiled over the piles of red earth and debris and handed a telegram to the tall sahib with the grizzled moustache who stood looking down into the valley at the great dam nearing completion.

The sahib read the telegram and passed his hand over his face as if to wipe off something clinging to it. He stood quite motionless, and from under the broad sun-helmet his eyes again travelled over the sweeping curve of the masonry that closed the valley. Then he turned and stared away over the labouring coolies, the cranes and steam shovels, the truck lines and rows of coolie-barracks, to where a cluster of bungalows stood beneath some withered trees, and finally set off with big loose strides towards them.

A woman was sitting in the veranda on the shady side of one of the bungalows. She was sewing and

raised her head as he approached, resting her chin on her hand. The man came closer and her eyes went to the telegram he carried. She half-rose, and sat down again.

"Jean . . ." He halted in front of her, and repeated her name as if he were searching for her in the darkness. She stood up.

"Jean—he's dead."

"I know." Her lips barely moved, the white, emotionless face stared up at him like the face of the dead. The little gold thimble she wore dropped with a tinkle to the ground and rolled unheeded into a corner. The man sat down on the step at the woman's feet and covered his face with his hands.

"My only son," he said. "This is my punishment."

In the silence that followed the withered leaves overhead made a little rattling noise in the hot wind. The woman moved across the echoing boards with the footsteps of an infinitely weary traveller. A door banged and presently through the jalousies of the window came her voice :

"Ah, God ! But what have *I* done ? "

7

But let us by all means pass quickly over those years of the Shadow. They have no real bearing on this story except that the tall sahib with the grizzled moustache who was Tug's father, having finished the dam, went home and fought in France. He only fought for a little while and then he went to join his son, who perhaps was waiting for him with his

slow, observant smile and the complete forgiveness which springs from understanding all. In that vast Fellowship no doubt he also met Bridgey's brother who won the sabre competition at Olympia, and a posthumous V.C. at, I think, Bullincourt.

Bridgey spent those grey years in a Grand Fleet battleship. They were for him—as for most of those who endured nearly five years of Scapa Flow—years that passed and left no trace in memory. They were years detached from life and swallowed in oblivion. Strain, anxiety, grief and boredom came in turn, and each seemed to sear the soul; yet six months after the armistice all that had somehow been forgotten. And Bridgey found himself in his first shore appointment.

He was then nearly twenty-six, but looked younger. There was a very youthful unsophistication in the eagerness of his outlook, in his rather old-fashioned courtesy to women. A sort of trustfulness expressed itself in his manner, as if he habitually thought only well of people he met. In truth, at twenty-six Bridgey was much the same as when he had embarked on the Spring Running at Tug Wilson's side. Perhaps Tug's influence had been stronger in death than it might have proved in life: the queer clean code by which they had "pulled the stroke through" was still Bridgey's creed. And whenever it wavered, when loneliness and monotony tempted him to forsake the uphill path, somehow or other the wide grey eyes of the Lone Wolf steadied him into the trail again; back across the years came the level reflective voice: "It's a mug's game, anyhow. . . ."

But the years, even the years of the Shadow, had not cured him of his secret romanticism. It was purged of the more sentimental vapourings of calf days, but the effect remained, however, and it brought unknown to him a shy remotely interrogative look into his eyes whenever they lit on a woman's face. He believed the secret of his quest to be his alone; those who make bold to claim understanding of the sex will perhaps confirm my belief that he shared it with every single woman who met his glance.

Because he had a rather engaging personality, and his brother's death had left him with a sufficiency of means to enter into such amusements as he chose, and, moreover, because he showed every indication of being entirely heartwhole, Bridgey found that people ashore were exceedingly kind. So kind, in fact, that had he been of the type whose head is easily turned, it is probable he would have speedily developed into something preposterous and objectionable. As it was he did not develop at all—if sophistication can be called development. He played games whenever he could and went for long solitary tramps over the moor; in spring and summer he explored with a trout rod the little streams that descend the deep-cleft coombes and valleys from granite upland. In the winter he occasionally hired a horse and rode with the hounds. With ample hard work to counterbalance play, Bridgey passed a year in this contented uneventful existence. It might have been eventful enough had he chosen to make it so; a dockyard and garrison port attracts matrons who have daughters to get off their hands, and Bridgey found favour in

their sight. That he passed safely through the various entanglements laid for his ingenuous feet was due less to growing worldliness than his ineradicable romanticism. He never even saw the lures because, almost subconsciously, he was looking all the time for Rosemary-that-is-for-Remembrance—although he had forgotten her appearance and somewhat inconveniently lengthy name. His constancy to his ideal was his salvation.

Then one fine evening, at a dance at Admiralty House, he found himself face to face with her.

Her actual name was Diana Aylwyn, and her nose was not in the least tip-tilted, neither was her mouth otherwise than normal in size. In fact, I do not pretend to know how Bridgey recognized her. But he was perfectly satisfied that his quest was ended the moment she raised her eyes to his.

This is a great mystery. It has been described as Love at First Sight. But it is never quite that, and in this case it was merely Recognition—anyhow, on Bridgey's part—of a very old love.

He found himself later in the evening in the billiard-room where he had gone to smoke a cigarette and attempt to calm the tumult of his very exultant and astonished mind. The Flag Lieutenant was there and a couple of Post Captains who had been dining with the Commander-in-Chief. They were choosing cues and rolling balls about the table preparatory to a game.

"Flags," said one, "who was that young woman I took down to dinner? She's pretty enough."

"Diana Aylwyn, sir."

"I know, but why is the name familiar? I've

never seen her before to my knowledge. Where have I heard her name?"

Bridgey was all ears on the instant.

"Diana Aylwyn!" echoed the other Captain. He paused in the act of chalking his cue and lowered his voice. "Wasn't that the girl who was talked about in the Morsby case just before the war?"

The Flag Lieutenant nodded, reluctantly, it seemed. "She's staying in the neighbourhood for a little while," he said.

"What was the Morsby case?" asked Diana's dinner partner. "I was in the West Indies just before the war. Never knew anything that was going on at home." He leaned over the table and led off into baulk. "She told me she'd been driving an ambulance in France and Serbia and God knows where, under fire most of the War. I don't know what she did before that."

"Didn't you read about it? Papers were all pretty full of it. Morsby—you know who I mean, fellow with pots of money who used to race at Cowes—and his wife took a party to Norway or somewhere in their yacht, and Diana Aylwyn was with them. When they got back there was a deuce of a bobbery. Morsby's wife sued—the Press all made the most of it—and this girl's name was dragged in. She was only a kid of eighteen—no parents—very well connected, and all that sort of thing—me to play? . . . Wife lost her case."

The other Captain missed an easy cannon. "I should hope she did. You don't tell me that girl——"

"Rummy business," said the other, shaking his head with judicial solemnity.

The Flag Lieutenant stiffened.

"She wouldn't be here to-night, sir, if Lady Orme weren't convinced——"

Bridgey glared, white with indignation, at the Captain who had spoken last. That officer moved towards the scoring board and recorded his last break.

"Oh, quite . . ." he said.

8

Many men had made love to Diana Aylwyn, each one after the imagination of his own heart; but none of them had wooed her as Bridgey did in the weeks that followed; very boyishly, and yet with a gravity of purpose into which vanity did not enter. There was an element of protectiveness in his attitude which at first amused her. In fact, at the outset she was tempted to flirt with him out of sheer curiosity, since with his candour and the ingenuousness of his outlook on life, he represented a type of young man she had not met before. But she forbore without quite knowing why; and then for reasons she did not inquire of her heart too deeply, was glad she had forborne.

Then suddenly she wished she had never seen Bridgey. She longed to send him away—out of sight and hearing and memory for ever. But she temporized with the reflection that in a few weeks she herself would go away, and that would be the end of it. And so Bridgey stayed, and talked about himself without guile, after the manner of a lover.

"I read 'Trilby' over again last night," she said to him one day as they rode back through the dewy covers after a morning's cubbing. "D'you know you remind me very much of 'Little Billee.'"

"Why?" asked Bridgey. "It's a long time since I read the book. Little Billee was in love with Trilby—wasn't that the story—and his people wouldn't let him marry her?"

"For an admirable reason," said Diana in a low voice. "But Trilby wouldn't marry him, anyhow."

"But what's that got to do with reminding you of me?" inquired Bridgey.

"I didn't say it did. You are like du Maurier's drawings—your profile." Bridgey turned his face towards her but she averted her eyes. Her tone was pleasantly impersonal when she spoke again. "I shall call you Little Billee," she said.

About a week after this conversation Bridgey went off by himself for a walk across the moor. If any of the mysterious ways pursued by young men in love can be predicted with certitude, the preliminary to a declaration of love is a withdrawal into some secret solitude.

Whatever chimera of romance he had pursued in the past, he found in Diana Aylwyn the fulfilment of all his ideals, all his hopes. And if anything were lacking to rouse his chivalry and perfect his knightly attitude of mind towards her, it was the story he had overheard in the billiard-room. It had shocked and tortured him; he had tossed sleeplessly at nights while his imagination conjured up a vision of that fearless maid facing the merciless public cross-examination of an eminent counsel bent on winning

his case. . . . Of the Sunday Press "making the most of it." And then with an immense effort of will he had purged his mind of the whole thing, save for the compassionate and tender impulse of protection that succeeded the first horror.

As he walked across the springy heather, carrying his hat and whistling out of the lightness of his heart, his imagination was busy building up a future that held one joyous obligation—the devoted shielding of his beloved against all the world.

And then far off along the flank of a tor he saw her riding towards him. His heart gave a leap of happiness, because he had told her the previous day he was going for this walk, and without prearrangement or promise, she had come to find him. "As well tell her to-day," sang his heart blithely, "this very hour!" And the larks overhead carolled their loudest and sweetest encouragement to his resolve.

Diana drew rein before him.

"I thought it was you," she said as he came to her stirrup. "I thought we might have tea together. One of Grandfather's tenants has a farm beyond that rise."

Bridgey nodded, almost too full of happiness to speak.

"And we'll have boiled eggs to our teas," added Diana hungrily, "because I hardly had any lunch. I rushed off to look for you. I think I'm slightly mad, Little Billee."

In the stuffy farmhouse parlour, when Diana had haltered her horse in the stable, they had tea together. They had never been alone together in a room before with the door closed. Bridgey found a

delicious sense of intimacy in this homely meal. The sight of Diana's gloves and whip thrown carelessly on a horsehair sofa was like a confession of her trust in him. The laboured discretion of the entrances made by the farmer's wife with hot scones and fresh tea was the world's recognition of their relationship. They made large teas, and went outside to escape from the closeness of the little room.

"I needn't start back for half an hour," said Diana. "Let's go and smoke our cigarettes somewhere out of the wind." They found a spot where the turf was dry, and sat with their backs against a lichen-stained stone wall in the eye of the declining sun.

Bridgey took a deep breath.

"Diana——" he said, and could say no more. He turned sideways and took her two hands in his. All the colour went out of her face.

"*My dear!*" whispered Bridgey. "*My dear, my very dear. . . .*"

To his consternation Diana drew her hands free. "I'm a beast," she said, and averted her face. "I knew when I came this was going to happen—but I came. . . . I think I'm mad. Oh, Little Billee, Little Billee! No, I can't go on calling you that. What is it they all call you—Bridgey . . . ?" She seized her whip and brought it down with a crack on the turf beside her. "Mad!" she repeated, and turned to face him. "You ought to hate me."

Bridgey gave a bewildered smile. "I don't want to hate you—I want to marry you. Diana, surely you know—you knew I loved you—from the very beginning?"

She turned her head again and stared out across the purple moor.

"Yes, I knew—at least I think I did. And I ought to have stopped you. I don't know why I didn't. I don't know what you've done. . . . I can't marry you. I don't think I can marry anybody . . . like you."

"But why not?"

"Oh, don't make me tell you. Please don't make me tell you."

Light flashed on Bridgey's distracted mind.

"Surely you don't mean that wretched yachting trip?" he said.

She stared at him dully. Then her expression changed. A faint expectant hope crept into her eyes. "Do you know about it? Have you always known—I mean, ever since we first met?"

"Yes," said Bridgey. "But as if that mattered!" Her eyes never left his. "Darling, do you think a silly lie like that can spoil this?"

She looked away. The hope had died out of her eyes. "You don't believe it then, do you?"

Bridgey laughed, but the sight of Diana's profile arrested his scornful mirth. Her lip was trembling ominously; she covered her face with her hands. Bridgey thought her pose infinitely pitiful. "I'm sorry, Diana. I didn't mean to hurt you; but the bare idea is so absurd. What is the matter? You're not crying, are you? Why are you crying—because I love you?"

Diana mastered herself and rose to her feet. "Yes," she said.

Bridgey rose, as white as she.

"Will you marry me?"

"No."

"Don't you love me, Diana?"

"No." She turned away from him and stumbled towards the gateway to the stables. Neither of them spoke as he slipped on the bridle and tightened the girths. She led the horse to a mounting stone and jumped without assistance into the saddle while he held the animal's head. Bridgey walked mutely beside her till they came to the gate of the moor, Diana keeping her eyes on the horizon to avoid seeing the misery in his face. She reined in finally.

"If you ever think of me again, think of me as a beast and a devil." She gathered the reins, and Bridgey raised a hand as if to try and detain her for a moment longer in his life. Then Diana did an inexplicable thing: she caught at his hand, bent down and pressed it with all her strength to her lips. Their pressure seemed to linger long after the thud of her horse's hoofs died away; after horse and rider waned to a speck and vanished over a rise.

9

Bridgey carried his hurt back to the sea—that "great sweet mother" who, on her broad bosom and in her own time, cures all things. He had tried to tell his own mother, and she stroked his hands tremulously but said very little—so little that he thought she couldn't understand. As a matter of fact, she understood better even than Bridgey himself at the time. But there are some things from which not even a mother can shield her son: in fact, the more tender

her influence, the greater his defencelessness in all experiences such as Bridgey had undergone.

He found himself Paymaster of a Light Cruiser in tropical waters before he had time to think about anything very much except his job; and then when he had leisure to indulge in retrospection a multitude of new interests, scenes and acquaintances demanded his attention. Ship life, from which he had had a respite for over a year, which is unlike any other life in the world, gripped him afresh. Its monastic regulation, governed as it is from hour to hour by bell and pipe and bugle, braced him. The familiar smells and sounds, even the manifold discomforts, welcomed him back to the life of old like a rough but friendly buffet across the shoulders.

And so gradually he forgot about Diana Aylwyn—or rather, his desire for her seemed to ebb away from his heart as the sap runs back to its mysterious reservoirs from a plant that has been mishandled. He was cured, too, of his romanticism, and thenceforward saw women no longer as impossible beings on another plane, but even as they trod his earth, erring and faulty as the sons of men.

It was in this ruthless clearness of vision that his sorrow lingered. He looked back on his friendship with Tug Wilson and saw that the ideal which had quickened it and had been the star of his endeavour was but a chimera after all. The flower whose scent had made his boyhood fragrant had matured into bitter fruit. And Tug Wilson was dead. There could never be another Spring Running; no joyous, light-footed quest of youth after some fresh ideal. Only the memory of his clean, temperate love for the

Lone Wolf preserved him from bitterness of spirit : whatever happened after that, that friendship remained indestructible and unassailable. But whereas in the years before his meeting with Diana Bridgey was always conscious of Tug's nearness, of late it seemed as if the dead had grown remote and shadowy, so that he even found it difficult to recall exactly what Tug looked like. . . . Bridgey looked ahead through the years and saw himself a rudderless ship—without purpose in life, deprived even of the near influence that had always guided his feet along the Trail ; perplexed and lonely.

The ship was cruising in the southern part of the Station about six months after commissioning. They were not far from the equator ; the nights were hot, particularly between decks, and the majority of the officers and men slept on deck. Bridgey, who slept on a camp-bed abaft the gun-shield, awoke one morning just as the first hint of light made the grey horizon visible. He awoke under the impression that someone had called him by name, and the voice that had spoken was Tug Wilson's.

He lay staring at the smooth surface of the windless sea, across which the long ripple of their bow wave curved away into infinity : the propellers sent a slight vibration through the ship's hull, and from the distant engine-room exhausts came the deep-pitched drone of the turbines. He remembered that they were due to arrive in harbour early that morning : he glanced at his wrist-watch, and saw that it would not be for another couple of hours. The hands were not yet stirring. He turned over and dozed off

to sleep again. He was conscious as he slept that Tug Wilson was also lying asleep on his mattress round the bend of the gun-shield. When, therefore, an hour later, he was awakened by a repetition of the hallucination of hearing his name called by the same voice, it was some moments before he could bring his mind back into its correct environment. He thought that he was on board a ship on the China Station, a Gunroom Officer, and that Tug had called him, as he often did, to land for a run before breakfast. The years between were a dark and terrible dream.

He was on his feet before the sleep had cleared from his brain, gazing round the quarter-deck. It had dwindled inexplicably in size, and the faces of the other sleepers were momentarily unfamiliar. . . .

Then he remembered, and sat down on his folding bed again. But it seemed to him somehow that the Lone Wolf was quite near; the sound of his voice was still in Bridgey's ears. From whatever remoteness he had withdrawn to, Tug Wilson had returned. . . .

Bridgey sat musing on the edge of his bed. It was broad day, and although the gun-shield and superstructure hid the view ahead, some seafaring sense he had acquired warned him that the land was not far off. He rose and walked barefooted to the other side of the deck.

Low down along the eastern horizon lay a tumultuous frieze of inky dark cloud. The sun had not yet risen, but the edges of the cloud bank were tinged with deepening fire. Close at hand a sombre range of mountains rose precipitously out of the sea. Against the pale turquoise of the sky they resembled

the colour of a toad's back, with the mist rising out of the valleys in gently stirring wreaths. The light grew stronger, tinging these shifting masses of vapour with delicate rose-pink and gold; shafts of sunlight struck upwards through the dark cloud-frieze, painting the mountain slopes with vivid green. Colour and light bathed the universe in an almost unendurable beauty, towards which the ship seemed to be drawn swiftly by some irresistible fascination rather than propelled by the agency of man.

Bridgey, standing by the rail in his pyjamas, realized suddenly that there were tears on his cheeks. They ran down unchecked. He was not crying in the sense that people cry with pain or grief or even pity. It was as if his soul had grown arid past enduring, and there had suddenly descended upon it a miraculous shower, beneficent and healing. In the instant it seemed as if all sorrow, all perplexity and lack of purpose dropped away from him. He realized as he blew his nose and squared his shoulders that not one iota of his experience of life had been in vain. It was as if, out of the triumphant splendour of the sunrise, a voice cried aloud that no endeavour is for ever lost, no hope entirely forlorn. Beyond the uttermost horizon of man's ideals, beyond all human attaining and achievement, there is something else which requires an unceasing striving after good. However noble the conception, whatever the goal, there is no finality.

The sun flamed up above the bank of cloud, and Bridgey turned slowly away from a dawn that had made all things new.

XIV

THE HEART OF THE PEOPLE

THE Flag Lieutenant, one of an assembly of Admirals and their staffs grouped about the neighbourhood of the Achilles Statue, stood struggling with a pair of new and refractory kid gloves.

When he was quite young—a midshipman, in fact—he had participated in a review of the Fleet at Southend. For three days the Fleet lay at the mercy of the People. For three days a sea-sick rabble of unnumbered thousands poured on board his ship. For three days they trampled on the cherished enamel of his picket-boat, scattered shrimps' heads and banana peel broadcast about the immaculate upper deck, employed the interior of the after turret for purposes undreamed of in the philosophy of its designer. . . . Uncomprehending, incomprehensible.

Now, at 9 A.M. on July 19, 1919, as he stood watching the blue and gold, the white cap-covers and aiguillettes of that Naval gathering of the clans, in the unfamiliar setting of a London park, the review of ten years before came back to his mind for reasons quite beyond his powers of analysis.

A brother staff officer strolled towards him, the ferrule of his scabbard clinking on the gravel. "I bet a bob my Old Man won't last the course," said he with a laugh. "We had an endurance trial on Sunday, and——"

The Flag Lieutenant smiled rather absently, because his mind was back in the Gunroom-flat of a now obsolete battleship, hovering round his sea-chest, on which sat an entire family party eating cold currant pudding out of a string bag. "Come on, 'Orace!" a stout matron had shouted to one of her roving progeny. "You just sit down this minute, and you shall 'ave 'arf a banana."

"Half a banana!" On the lid of *his* sea-chest, just when he wanted to shift into plain clothes and go ashore.

How he had hated that party!

Half an hour passed, and every few minutes a fresh arrival stepped out of his car at the kerb. The man whose blockading squadron had squeezed the last inch out of the strangle-hold on Germany stood on the outskirts of the group.

"Ain't he got a lot of gold stuff on his sleeve!" said a maiden.

"Come on," retorted her friend, "there's a better-lookin' one over 'ere. We ain't got all the mornin' to waste."

Verily, verily, a prophet was not without honour, save among his own people, thought the Flag Lieutenant.

The Flag Lieutenant's companion surveyed the scene. "Funny thing for the Navy to be doing, somehow," he said, "marching through London." It didn't seem to occur to him that the Navy had done anything to justify the exertion. His wandering eye embraced the demure gathering of the W.R.N.S., resting in the park chairs with a foresight that was

somehow typical, while everyone else stood about. A few pairs of eyes met his with veiled feminine interest.

"And why the devil they want to disband the 'Wrens,'" he continued without apparent relevance, "is more than I can understand."

"Fall in, please," said a voice, and the gathering clanked into the roadway to take up its positions. From beyond the trees on the borders of the park rose a sound like the murmur of the sea. The sightseers began to drift towards the gates.

The Flag Lieutenant took up his allotted position at the end of a line of ten other Flag Lieutenants and Secretaries. Ahead, five deep and thirty strong, were the Flag Officers ranged behind the Commander-in-Chief. Somewhere along the line a bugle sounded. The march had started.

After the comparative tranquillity of the park the tumult of Knightsbridge was like the roaring of a great fire. As if to meet a blaze of coloured flames they passed into the streets, and out of that great sea of waving flags and streamers came the passionate, exultant roar of Victory.

For a while the Flag Lieutenant marched with his eyes on the back of the fellow staff officer's head in front of him, conscious only of sharing in some tremendous emotional outburst. It did not somehow occur to him that he or those about him were the objects of the storm of cheers that beat about his ears like hail on a window-pane. Then he turned his head slightly, and met the eyes of a stout man with a red moustache standing on the edge of the crowd.

"Bravo, boy! Oh, bravo, laddie!" roared the stout man, laughing full in his face with affectionate comradeship.

It was the impression of a second, one note separated from all that vast cataclysm of sound, one face detached from all the blur of shouting mouths and brandished bunting, but it filled the Flag Lieutenant with an extraordinary desire to go back and shake hands with the stout man. It mattered not that Czecho-Slovak private and Chinese colonel might have caught the stout man's eye and received just as spontaneous a greeting. At that moment, as far as the Flag Lieutenant was concerned, it was his procession. All London was there to shout at him, and it is not unlikely that at some moment or other a similar harmless illusion filled the finite heart of every participator in that triumph, were it that of *poilu* or admiral, Merchant Jack or mounted general; even down to the bulldog . . . !

Gradually as he became accustomed to the uproar and kaleidoscopic effect of the crowd, he found himself quietly gathering impressions, cameo-cut memories of the route; they were passing a huge hotel, a great cliff of masonry with every window blocked by faces. Tier by tier his eyes travelled to the top story, beyond it to a single attic window. A woman in black sat there alone, her arms outstretched on the sill and her head bowed so that her face was invisible, resting on her sleeve.

Long after they had passed, that forlorn figure lingered in the Flag Lieutenant's memory. She had meant to share in Britain's Triumph—wave a flag perhaps; and then her brave woman's heart had

failed her, suddenly remembering the one face that could never be raised to hers.

South of the river it seemed as if the intensity of the acclamation redoubled. Never in his life had he realized that the human voice, however greatly magnified by numbers, could rise to such a gale of sound. His eyes roved over that sea of faces eighty and a hundred deep, and instantly he recognized them. This was the People. There, repeated over and over again in countless thousands, was the family party who had picnicked on the lid of his sea-chest ten years before, cheering him out of the depths of their hearts, out of the squalor and dirt of their surroundings.

Yet in some indefinable way they had changed. Ten years ago they would have greeted the Navy with uncomprehending noisiness, exulting over a great possession about which they understood nothing nor wished to understand. To-day they welcomed Admirals, Midshipmen, Bluejackets and "Wrens" as comrades side by side with whom they had achieved victory. "Good old Beatty!" shrilled Sal of the pickle factory; just, in fact, as she would presently acclaim her Bill, marching with the Mons Star on his breast and three wound stripes on his sleeve. . . .

They too had done their bit, these people of the mean streets and looming factories; earned their right to participate in this triumph; and somehow symbolic of their share in War was their share in this long day. They fainted as they had fainted in food queues, from weariness and hunger; the procession marched by in all its panoply of standards and medal

ribbons : they for the most part wore black, memento of the years of heart-sick anxiety that some moment had changed to an abiding sorrow.

A girl broke out of the crowd, dodged under a policeman's arm, and stood hesitating as the lines swung past. Then, acting on some mysterious impulse, she stepped forward a pace and thrust a bunch of red roses into the Flag Lieutenant's hands. For an instant their eyes met, and she was back again, swallowed in the roaring crowd before he could thank her.

Rent for half an hour's rest on the lid of his sea-chest, ten years before, had been paid. The Flag Lieutenant swallowed something in his throat that seemed about the size and consistency of a billiard ball. It had been paid a thousandfold.

He wished that ere the night he might find some service he could perform on behalf of the Navy that would "square yards" for that pretty act.

Onward through South London, North over Westminster Bridge, and the procession was back in what was to the Flag Lieutenant a more familiar environment. They turned into Whitehall and caught a glimpse ahead of the white cenotaph reared in the centre of the thoroughfare above the ripple of flags and marching men.

The Flag Lieutenant knew, as everyone knew, what the inscription was that would presently meet his eyes. He had intended, when raising his hand to the salute, to try and visualize one face of all the glorious dead he had called friends—that of his father. Yet, when he drew near the severe beauty of the memorial, with its four guards bowed above

their rifle-butts, the exquisite simplicity of that single sentence cried to him that the dead were no longer fathers or chums; neither brothers nor husbands; but one vast calm Spirit, brooding in love over all.

So they passed, and the cheering, dulled in the presence of that beautiful conception in white plaster, broke out afresh like a torrent bursting a dam.

The broad façade of Buckingham Palace loomed up at the end of the Mall's tricolour perspective. The Flag Lieutenant craned his neck to catch a glimpse of his Admiral ahead. The march was nearly over, and the Flag Lieutenants were congratulating themselves in undertones on the staying powers of their "masters." The cheering on either side had become almost unheard from very monotony; but the boys of Greenwich School, led by an impassioned Chief Petty Officer, turned the weary eyes of the column towards them with smiling appreciation. Chelsea Pensioners, with tremulous hands raised to the salute, gave splashes of vivid crimson to right and left; and then the step quickened. All eyes turned towards the beloved familiar figure standing in the pavilion of green and gold; hands went up in salute, and the Flag Lieutenant found his dry lips shaping the words that brought every evening of his life to a close:

"The King, God bless him!"

* * * * *

The Flag Lieutenant had finished dinner and stood on the steps of his club watching the crowd surging along Piccadilly towards Hyde Park. The sky was illumined fitfully by the glare of bonfires

to the westward, and the mild damp air hummed with a multitude of voices.

A club-mate came out of the vestibule behind him and stopped to light a cigarette. "Care to come to a dance?" he asked. "Only just round the corner—Berkeley Square."

The Flag Lieutenant hesitated. The Burgundy he had drunk at dinner said it would be a good thing to wind up the evening in the company of pretty women. For an instant he had a vision of white necks and shoulders; the lure of violin music sounded in his ears. Then he remembered that his debt to the People for a bunch of red roses remained unpaid. Perhaps the Burgundy had a say in that matter, too, for it was a rather far-fetched sort of notion, quite undefined. . . .

"No, thanks," he said. "I'm feeling a bit fagged after that Marathon this morning! I think I shall smoke a cigar in the park and watch the fireworks."

He was in uniform, but he put on a rainproof coat, buttoned it up under his chin, and, pulling his cap over his eyes, joined the throng setting westward.

The faces round him looked tired, he thought, but somehow very happy. Working people in their best clothes, mostly; elderly couples, girls hanging on young men's arms, children trailing silently in the wake of their parents. They walked in orderly composure, as if taking part in some procession regulated by an inflexible and invisible law.

Inside Hyde Park there was the same grave sobriety of demeanour. The ragged outline of the

trees stood up dark against the illuminations in the sky. Fiery serpents of light rose writhing out of the darkness, burst into a myriad of stars and descended in cascades of colour that lit the upturned faces of slow-moving thousands.

The Flag Lieutenant lit a pipe and strolled northwards towards the open spaces. Here and there little groups of men and girls were dancing in the fantastic light. Lovers sat with their arms round each other in the shadows, oblivious as the dead. And all round was the restless, ever-shifting crowd, oppressive in its vastness. Rain began to fall.

Then, from the darkness of a clump of trees, came the squeal of a woman. A girl came stumbling and panting towards him.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I'm frightened!" And nearly threw herself into the Flag Lieutenant's arms.

"What's frightened you?" he asked.

"A man," she replied, hands raised to the disorder of hat and hair. "Pullin' me about . . . the beast!"

The Flag Lieutenant stared towards the trees. A shadow slunk off amid the shadows.

"Well," he said at length, "you're all right now, aren't you?" He looked down at the pale plain face of a domestic servant in her Sunday finery.

"Yes." She considered him for a moment. "But I'd like to stay with you for a bit."

He drew two chairs together, and they sat down. His companion's shoulder rested comfortably against his. She gave a little sigh of contentment and stared gravely at the illuminated sky.

"Why did you bolt to me," asked the Flag Lieutenant after a while, "when you were frightened?"

She turned her head. "Ain't you in the Navy?"

He nodded. She made as if to speak, thought better of it, and resumed her observation of the fireworks, lips a little apart. The rain fell steadily.







